



Poland

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Chapter 1 | Geography



The Valley of the Five Polish Ponds in Zakopane.
Flickr / Martin

Introduction

The central European country Poland stands at a crossroads within the continent—the country exists between northwestern Europe’s extensive forests, the Atlantic Ocean’s busy sea lanes, and the wide plains of the Eurasian frontier. Poland’s terrain was formed from thousands of years of glacial activity, leaving sprawling plains dotted with lakes and crisscrossed by rivers. Its major rivers originate at or travel through the mountain ranges that trace its southern border, racing through the lowlands and plains on their way to the Baltic Sea. The lowlands and uplands that make up the heart of Poland are home to extensive woodlands, meadows, pastures, and agricultural activity. Civilizations have leveraged Poland’s vast biodiversity for centuries, establishing societies along the Vistula, Oder, and around the Gulf of Gdańsk. While remarkable, Poland’s landscape leaves its population susceptible to natural disasters; human activity has also caused significant pollution and poses another serious threat.^{1,2}

1 Hans Roos et al., “Poland: Land,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

2 Into Poland, “Geography of Poland,” n.d., <https://www.intopoland.com/poland-info/geography-of-poland.html>

Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

Poland is a roughly uninterrupted plain with 312,685 sq km (120,728 sq mi) of territory—8,430 sq km (3,255 sq mi) is water and 304,255 sq km (117,473 sq mi) is land. Almost half of the available land is suitable for agricultural purposes, and just over 30% is forested. Poland’s coastline extends 634 km (394 mi) and lays claim to 12 nautical miles of territory extending into the Baltic Sea.^{3,4} The country is mostly flat and roughly divided into two regions, north and south. The wooded northern region is home to the Masurian Lakeland, an expansive area that includes lowlands and plains. In the southwest, a series of mountains trace along the border. The country’s primarily flat terrain and lack of significant natural barriers have factored into its historical predisposition to conflict.^{5,6,7} The country’s plains, Lakelands, and mountains contain 2,250 species of seed plants, mostly those found in the Northern Hemisphere’s temperate climate belt. Forests blanket about a quarter of the country and are mostly beech, fir, and oak.^{8,9}

Baltic Coast

Swamps, lagoons, and dunes characterize much of Poland’s Baltic Sea coastline, which constitutes the country’s northern border as it stretches from Germany to Russia. This general region is known as Pomerania; the Pomeranian Bay and Gulf of Gdańsk are Poland’s major inlets. The waters of the Vistula and Oder rivers terminate at the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Coast’s major ports are Gdańsk and Gdynia in the east and Szczecin on the Oder River in the west. A significant portion of the central coastline is sparsely inhabited, home to just a handful of fishing ports or resorts, with the largest resort in Kołobrzeg.^{10,11} The Baltic coast also contains a large portion of the EuroVelo cycling network that runs throughout Europe.¹²

Lake Regions

Poland is home to five lake districts or Lakelands: Great Poland, Kashubia, Masuria, Pomerania, and Suwałki.¹³ The Masurian Lakeland in northeastern Poland is one of the more popular lake districts, with more than 2,000 lakes and a total area of 52,000 sq km (20,000 sq mi). It begins south of the Baltic coastal plains and runs 290 km (180 mi) in an easterly direction. The region contains many forests, meadows, pastures, marshes, and dunes. While the overall area is not very populated, the Masurian Lakeland is home to urban populations in the cities of Elbląg, Ełk, and Olsztyn, along with the popular resort towns Giżycko and Mikołajki.¹⁴ In 2011, Masuria was a finalist in the New Seven Wonders of nature initiative.¹⁵

3 Central Intelligence Agency, “Poland,” *World Factbook*, 16 April 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

4 European Commission, “Country Overview and Assessment: Poland,” n.d., https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/sites/maritimeaffairs/files/docs/body/poland_climate_change_en.pdf

5 Poland Travel Guide, “Geography of Poland,” <http://polandtravelguide.org/geography-of-poland/>

6 World Atlas, “Poland Geography,” 7 April 2017, <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/europe/poland/pland.htm>

7 “Geography,” in *Poland: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/poland/22.htm>

8 Poland Travel Guide, “Geography of Poland,” <http://polandtravelguide.org/geography-of-poland/>

9 Hans Roos et al., “Poland: Climate,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Climate>

10 Hans Roos et al., “Poland: Land: The Coastal Plain,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Land>

11 Lonely Planet, “Poland: Kołobrzeg,” n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/poland/kolobrzeg>

12 EuroVelo, “EuroVelo 10: Baltic Sea Cycle Route,” n.d., <https://en.eurovelo.com/ev10/poland>

13 Find Fun Facts, “Poland,” n.d., https://findfunfacts.appspot.com/world_atlas/poland.html

14 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Masurian Lakeland,” 17 June 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Masurian-Lakeland>

15 New 7 Wonders of Nature, “One of the 28 Finalists: Masuria Poland,” n.d., <https://nature.new7wonders.com/wonders/masurian-lake-district-poland/>

The Great Poland Lakeland in central Poland features lakes that were formed by depressions resulting from glacial meltwater.¹⁶ The Pomeranian Lakeland sits just south of the Baltic Sea's coastal plain with more than 1,000 lakes; this region is known for its valleys formed into roughly rectangular blocks by river drainage patterns.¹⁷ The Kashubian Lake District in northern Poland has more than 500 lakes, two landscape parks, and more than 25 nature reserves.¹⁸ The Suwałki Lake District in northeastern Poland has an abundance of lakes and rivers, numerous landscape parks, and a portion of Wigry National Park.¹⁹

Central Lowlands & Plains

This vast, generally flat region was formed primarily by glacial activity in the distant past, leaving the majority of the region roughly 300 m (984 ft) below sea level.²⁰ It is roughly divided by the basins of the rivers that cut through it—the Silesian Lowland, near the upper Oder River; the Great Poland Lowland by the Warta River; and the Mazovian and Podlasian lowlands by the Vistula River. The central lowlands contain significant agricultural activity as well as various industrial hubs.²¹

Błędów Desert

The Błędów Desert is Central Europe's largest inland concentration of loose sand. Glacial activity deposited the sand in the region, and human activity during the Middle Ages lowered the water table in the area, making the sandy patch of land highly resistant to significant plant growth, as seen in the desert's immediate surroundings. In modern times, there is evidence that the surrounding forest is regaining some of the desert land.²²

Carpathian Mountain Range

The Carpathians chain is home to several mountains in Central Europe. The Outer Western and Outer Eastern portions of the Carpathians trace along the country's border with Slovakia; the majority of the range curves southward then eastward as it reaches Serbia. Geologically, this segment is noted for its nappe characteristics, in which massive rocks have folded over each other over time.^{23, 24} The most prominent range within the Carpathians is the Tatra Mountains. The Tatras are a relatively short and narrow range that features an Alpine biome, which is responsible for its five distinct climate-vegetation belts. The Tatras are home to Mount Rysy, the highest point in Poland at 2,499 m (8,199 ft).^{25, 26, 27, 28}

16 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Great Poland Lakeland," 18 August 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Great-Poland-Lakeland>

17 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Pomeranian Lakeland," 17 June 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pomeranian-Lakeland>

18 World Is Beautiful, "Photo Gallery: Kashubian Lake District," n.d., <https://www.worldisbeautiful.eu/en/gallery/43-kashubian-lake-district.php>

19 Eastern Poland, "Suwałki Region," n.d., <https://eastern-poland.eu/suwalki-region/>

20 Into Poland, "Geography of Poland," n.d., <https://www.intopoland.com/poland-info/geography-of-poland.html>

21 Hans Roos et al., "Poland: Land: The Lake Region and Central Lowlands," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Land>

22 Atlas Obscura, "Błędów Desert," n.d., <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/bledow-desert>

23 Mark Baker, "Poland's Playground: High-Altitude Activities in the Carpathian Mountains," Lonely Planet, 20 November 2015, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/polands-playground-high-altitude-activities-in-the-carpathian-mountains>

24 Jerzey A. Kondracki, "Carpathian Mountains," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 28 May 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Carpathian-Mountains>

25 Animal Corner, "Alpine Biome," n.d., <https://animalcorner.org/alpine/>

26 Polish Tourism Organisation, "Tatra Mountains," n.d., <https://www.poland.travel/en/experience/hiking/mountains/tatra-mountains>

27 "Geography," in *Poland: A Country Study*, ed. Glenn E. Curtis (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), <http://countrystudies.us/poland/22.htm>

28 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Małopolskie," 22 September 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Malopolskie#ref886069>

Sudetes Mountains

The Sudetes mountain range stretches along the southwest portion of Poland, west of the Carpathians along the country's borders with the Czech Republic and Germany. Like the Carpathians, the Sudetes are comprised of several ranges divided into three main groups—the West, Middle, and East Sudetes. A prominent range is the Table Mountains, which consists of sandstone slabs that rise some 200 m (656 ft) above its adjacent valleys. The mountains contain significant deposits of precious minerals and ores, which have been mined for many years; select former mines are open for tourist visitations. The Sudetes is also considered the first mountain range in the world to be developed for recreational use. Skiing and hiking are very popular activities throughout the range.^{29,30}

Climate

Poland's climate is temperate with cold winters and warm summers that are influenced by ocean air from the west, polar air from the Scandinavia and Russia, and subtropical air from the south. Much of Poland's climate and features were developed during the last Ice Age. Poland experiences weather phenomena consistent with both continental and maritime environments and features six distinct seasons in all: winter, early spring, spring, summer, fall, and late fall or early winter. Overcast, rainy days are common throughout Poland in part because of year-round barometric depressions that move easterly across the region and separate subtropical conditions from colder airflow. Winters are crisp and cold as polar-continental, and Arctic airflow crosses the country. Summers and falls are when the most agreeable weather is typically experienced as the dry subtropical air warms the area. Annual temperatures average 7–8°C (44–46°F) from the lowlands to the northeast. Annual rainfall reaches about 610 mm (24 in) overall, with the mountains averaging 787–1,194 mm (31–47 in) and the plains averaging 457 mm (18 in).^{31,32}

29 Polish Tourism Organisation, "Sudety Mountains," n.d., <https://www.poland.travel/en/experience/hiking/mountains/sudety-mountains>

30 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Sudeten," 15 February 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudeten>

31 Poland Travel Guide, "Geography of Poland," <http://polandtravelguide.org/geography-of-poland/>

32 Hans Roos et al., "Poland: Climate," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Climate>

Bodies of Water

A significant portion of Poland's northern border is its coastline with the Baltic Sea, which features beaches, lagoons, bays, and a prominent gulf. Most of Poland's rivers drain into the Baltic and are being explored for expansion potential with commerce activities.³³ The country's lake districts contain almost 10,000 lakes, many of them relatively small, averaging an area of .01 sq km (.004 sq mi).^{34, 35} The main ports of Poland are found in Gdańsk, Gdynia, Świnoujście, and Szczecin, with the Port of Gdańsk as its largest and Gdynia home to the headquarters of the Polish Navy.^{36, 37}

Baltic Sea

This shallow, partially enclosed sea is the largest body of brackish water in the world. The Baltic covers 386,000 sq km (149,000 sq mi) in all.³⁸ Poland's Baltic Coast extends from Germany to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad and is a popular tourist and recreational destination; everything from water sports to bicycling, hiking, and exploration of historical landmarks are popular along the coastline. The Polish Navy utilizes the Baltic Sea for periodic domestic and joint naval exercises and maneuvers. NATO's naval presence in the Baltic has seen a reduction since the Cold War ended, despite the persistent potential of regional threats. Poland's interests in revitalizing its naval fleet could ultimately bolster the security of the Baltic.^{39, 40}

The Trójmiasto tri-city urban area of Gdynia–Sopot–Gdańsk along the Gulf of Gdańsk is particularly well known for its thriving city life and natural landscape popular with cyclists, surfers, and beachgoers. Several fishermen's villages dot the coastline as well, and some beaches feature beached flat-bottom fishing boats that were popular before the mid-20th century. The Baltic is also a popular sailing destination, with the West Pomeranian Sailing Trail and many other routes that take vessels through lakes, lagoons, rivers, and alongside natural reserves. Outdoor activities are also popular in the winter; it is common to see people cross-country skiing on the beaches.^{41, 42}

Gulf of Gdańsk

The Gulf of Gdańsk is an inlet of the Baltic Sea situated in the northeastern corner of Poland, alongside its border with the Kaliningrad province of Russia. It runs 64 km (40 mi) north-south and 97 km (60 mi) east-west with depths reaching more than 113 m (371 ft). The Vistula and other rivers empty into the Gulf through the Vistula Lagoon. The Gulf is a popular destination for water activities and vacations, particularly around the Trójmiasto area and the Bay of Puck on the Hel Peninsula.^{43, 44} The Gulf of Gdańsk is the fastest growing port in Europe; in 2018 alone,

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- 33 Maritime Journal, "Poland's Inland Waterways to Become 'International Shipping Routes,'" n.d., <https://www.maritimejournal.com/news101/marine-civils/port-harbour-and-marine-construction/polands-inland-waterways-to-become-international-shipping-routes>
- 34 Hilde Mertens, "The Polish Baltic Coast Will Surprise You," Go To Poland, 15 July 2016, <http://gotopoland.eu/explore-poland/polish-baltic-coast-will-surprise.html>
- 35 Maps of the World, "Poland Lakes and Rivers," n.d., <https://www.mapsofworld.com/poland/tourism/lakes-rivers.html>
- 36 Polish Tourism Organization, "Ports," n.d., <https://www.poland.travel/en/plan-your-trip/travel-information/by-ship-or-ferry/ports>
- 37 Polandin.com, "President: Navy Must be Rebuilt," 24 June 2018, <https://polandin.com/37787830/president-navy-must-be-rebuilt>
- 38 Alastair Dougal Couper and Alice F.A. Button, "Baltic Sea," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 30 December 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Baltic-Sea>
- 39 Krystian Wyrzykowski, "Submarine Exercises – ORP Orzeł – in the Baltic Sea, Poland @ Sea, 18 May 2020, <http://www.polandatsea.com/largest-submarine-of-the-polish-navy/>
- 40 Dov S. Zakheim, "NATO'S Disappearing Navies Invite Trouble in the Baltic Sea," 23 July 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/454190-natos-disappearing-navies-invite-trouble-in-the-baltic-sea>
- 41 Hilde Mertens, "The Polish Baltic Coast Will Surprise You," Go To Poland, 15 July 2016, <http://gotopoland.eu/explore-poland/polish-baltic-coast-will-surprise.html>
- 42 Frommer's, "Things to do in Poland's Baltic Coast," n.d., <https://www.frommers.com/destinations/polands-baltic-coast>
- 43 Chelsey Parrott-Sheffer, "Gulf of Gdańsk," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 4 June 2008, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gulf-of-Gdańsk>
- 44 European Marine Biodiversity Sites, "Bay of Puck, Southern Baltic," n.d., http://www.iopan.gda.pl/projects/puckbay/html/pkt_01p.html

it grew by 20%. A partnership with Singapore seeks to expand the gulf's commerce capacity to 100 million tons per year, which would make it the biggest port on the Baltic.⁴⁵ Like nearby Gdynia, the gulf is commonly used by the Polish armed forces for maritime training and exercises. Military activity during World War II has recently revealed its ecological toll on the waters; ships scuttled by the Allies at the end of the war are believed to be leaking dangerous chemicals and pose significant explosive risks.^{46, 47}

Vistula River

The Vistula River is the largest in Poland. It runs 1,047 km (651 mi) and has a drainage basin of 194,000 sq km (75,100 sq mi), most of which is within Poland. Its waters originate in the Beskid Mountains, flowing south to north as it makes its way through several Polish cities, including Kraków and Warsaw. The river is divided into three sections: the upper, middle, and lower. Water levels vary by section—the upper averages 3.65 m (12 ft), the middle averages, 7.62 m (25 ft), and the lower averages 10 m (33 ft). The river also contains a variety of aquatic plant life and more than 40 species of fish.^{48, 49}

Approximately 88% of the Vistula River composes its transport corridor and features three classes of navigability.⁵⁰ The Vistula has historically been an important trade route, dating back to the Stone Age. In its journey to the Baltic Sea, the river is joined by other streams and rivers and cuts through the manmade Lake Goczałkowice in its journey northward. Toward the end of its run, the Vistula becomes an important waterway. While the Vistula has the potential to be a major transportation route for the entire region, it is prone to many navigational hazards that have prohibited its heavy use; extensive infrastructure improvements have been planned to improve its functionality.^{51, 52}

Oder River

The Oder River is an important waterway, 854 km (531 mi) in all, that originates in the Czech Republic as it traces along the Germany-Poland border on its way to the Baltic Sea. The river flows from the Czech Republic's Hrubý Jeseník Mountains in a southeast-northwest direction. Once the river enters Poland, it alternates in width from 1.6 km (1 mi) to 9.65 km (6 mi). As the Oder forms the Germany-Poland border, it is split into two canals: the Oder–Spree and Oder–Havel. On its journey to the Baltic, it splits again into two branches—the Western and Easter Oder. The Oder's flow volume is among the lowest for rivers that flow to the Baltic, necessitating storage reservoirs for it in its upper tributaries.⁵³

45 Maritime Executive, "Port of Gdansk Leads Polish Trade Delegation to Singapore," 24 October 2019, <https://maritime-executive.com/corporate/port-of-gdansk-leads-polish-trade-delegation-to-singapore>

46 Krystian Wyrzykowski, "ORP Grom Fire Tsks in the Gulf of Gdańsk," Poland @ Sea, 7 May 2020, <http://www.polandatsea.com/orp-grom-fire-tasks-in-the-gulf-of-gdansk-waters/>

47 UPI, "Mustard Gas Traces Found Close to Poland's Baltic Sea Coast," 28 October 2013, <https://www.upi.com/Energy-News/2013/10/28/Mustard-gas-traces-found-close-to-Polands-Baltic-Sea-coast/31521382932920/>

48 Jerzy Pruchnicki and Władysław Parczewski, "Vistula River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vistula-River>

49 Wojciech Majewski, "Vistula River, Its Characteristics and Management," *Int J Hydro*, 14 August 2018, <https://medcraveonline.com/IJH/vistula-river-its-characteristics-and-management.html>

50 Maritime Journal, "Poland's Inland Waterways to Become 'International Shipping Routes,'" n.d., <https://www.maritimejournal.com/news101/marine-civils/port-harbour-and-marine-construction/polands-inland-waterways-to-become-international-shipping-routes>

51 Jerzy Pruchnicki and Władysław Parczewski, "Vistula River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vistula-River>

52 Raillan Brooks, "Turning Poland's Vistula River into a Shipping Superhighway," *Audubon*, March–April 2015, <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/march-april-2015/turning-polands-vistula-river-shipping>

53 Jerzy Pruchnicki and Władysław Parczewski, "Oder River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9 July 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Oder-River>

Historically, the Oder has been a hotspot for trade activity; along with the Vistula River, it served as a rough boundary for the emerging Polish state in the ninth and 10th centuries. Today, the river is considered the most important shipping and cargo transport inland waterway. Transportation along the Oder is essential to regional industries as it provides an additional method of access to the Szczecin seaport. It is estimated that the Oder handles 10 percent of the port's total tonnage. The Oder is connected to the central European waterway network and the Vistula by a series of canals, allowing for the future establishment of a viable commercial waterway route that transports goods between east and west.^{54, 55}

Warta River

The Warta is the second-longest river that exists entirely within Poland; it begins in central Poland and its navigable waters flow 808 km (502 mi) before terminating into the Oder. With a basin measuring 54,607 sq km (21,084 sq mi), it is the third-largest river in Poland. It also receives water from the Polish plain.⁵⁶ A portion of the Warta is a key component of the Oder's overall inland waterways commercial transportation network.^{57, 58}

Lake Śniardwy

Lake Śniardwy, one of more than 2,000 lakes in Masurian Lakeland, is the largest lake in Poland. It also acts as a drinking water reservoir for the Warsaw and Mazovia province populations.⁵⁹ The lake is nicknamed the Masuria Ocean and measures 114 sq km (44 sq mi), has 91.73 km (57 mi) of shoreline, and an average depth of 5.8 m (19 ft). Lake Śniardwy, like much of the region, formed as the result of glacial activity thousands of years ago. Its shoreline features dense forests of pine, spruce, and many other tree species. The lake is known for its blue waters and is a popular destination for watersports such as fishing, paddling, and sailing. During the winter, ice skating and iceboating are popular outdoor activities on the lake.^{60, 61, 62}

54 Jerzy Pruchnicki and Władysław Parczewski, "Oder River," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9 July 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Oder-River>

55 Wiesław Galor, "Sea-River Shipping in Polish Inland Waters," *Scientific Journals of the Maritime University of Szczecin*, 16 June 2017, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6f59/1a0c03f315b5832033fc1394f25ef0560c80.pdf>

56 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Warta River," 13 February 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Warta-River>

57 Wiesław Galor, "Sea-River Shipping in Polish Inland Waters," *Scientific Journals of the Maritime University of Szczecin*, 16 June 2017, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6f59/1a0c03f315b5832033fc1394f25ef0560c80.pdf>

58 Encyclopedia.com, "Poland," 14 July 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/germany-scandinavia-and-central-europe/polish-political-geography/poland>

59 Science in Poland, "Scientists Examine the Water Quality and Clearness in the Śniardwy Lake," 28 May 2012, <https://scienceinpoland.pap.pl/en/node/26027>

60 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Warmińsko-Mazurskie: Geography," 29 March 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Warmińsko-Mazurskie#ref886157>

61 Lakelubbers, "Lake Śniardwy, Warmia-Masuria, Poland," n.d., <https://www.lakelubbers.com/lake-sniardwy-1785/>

62 Booking.com, "Poland's Most Magical Lakes," 8 December 2018, <https://www.booking.com/articles/poland-most-magical-lakes.html>

Major Cities

Poland is home to several large urban centers, each with distinct character and history.⁶³ Most of Poland's major cities feature modern architecture and infrastructure along with several historical districts or landmarks that date back as far as the 10th century.^{64, 65}

City ⁶⁶	Population
Warsaw	1,702,139
Łódź	768,755
Kraków	755,050
Wrocław	634,893
Gdańsk	461,865

Warsaw

Warsaw is the capital of Poland and one of many cities along the Vistula River, 386 km (240 mi) south of the Gulf of Gdańsk in the Warsaw Plain. Originally just 1.25 sq km (0.5 sq mi) in size, the city stands today at 445 sq km (172 sq mi). The Vistula bisects the city, creating a 1,190 m- (3,900 ft-)wide boundary between the two sides. The city is further divided into seven districts, a reflection of its historical development. Growth and change have been at the forefront of Warsaw's development, as industries took root in the area and social and economic initiatives were implemented. The city's extensive history is evident in the architecture of its surviving or recreated buildings; one of the more prominent sections of Warsaw is Old Town, which features medieval period buildings and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1980. The city is also home to the world's longest bridge, the Siekierkowski Bridge, and the Palace of Culture and Science, the tallest building in Poland. The city is a popular tourist destination, with an average of 8.3 million visitors each year.^{66, 67, 68}

Warsaw is known for its tenacity and how it has blended elements of the old and new. The capital of Poland has been the setting of many assaults and occupations throughout its history that have all but destroyed the city, only for it to rebuild and regain its prominence. Most recently, Germany systematically destroyed parts of the city during World War II. In August 1944, the Warsaw Uprising was staged by an underground resistance movement to liberate the city from German occupation; by October, however, the uprising was suppressed and significant portions of the city were destroyed.⁶⁹ After the war, the population grew again and within a short period, numerous historical landmarks were faithfully restored to their original state. Warsaw's population was historically multinational and included Germans, Jews, and Russians until World War II, after which the returning refugees were primarily Roman Catholic Poles. Warsaw's official motto is the Latin phrase *contemnit procellas* ("it defies the storms").⁷⁰

63 Maps of the World, "Cities in Poland," n.d., <https://www.mapsofworld.com/poland/cities/>

64 Anna Cymer, "A Foreigner's Guide to Polish Architecture," Culture.pl, 29 December 2014, <https://culture.pl/en/article/a-foreigners-guide-to-polish-architecture>

65 Culture.pl, "Historical Buildings in Poland," 9 January 2008, <https://culture.pl/en/article/historical-buildings-in-poland>

65 World Population Review, "Warsaw Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/warsaw-population/>

67 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Warsaw," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 30 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Warsaw>

68 Find Fun Facts, "Poland," n.d., https://findfunfacts.appspot.com/world_atlas/poland.html

69 *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "Warsaw Uprising," 31 July 2019, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-warsaw-polish-uprising>

70 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Warsaw," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 30 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Warsaw>

Łódź

Łódź encompasses 293.25 sq km (113.22 sq mi) and is located in central Poland on the Vistula and Oder rivers watersheds.⁷¹ The city was a small settlement for hundreds of years before it was transformed into a textile manufacturing hub that attracted international interest from weavers and artisans; by the late 19th century, Łódź had evolved into a center for cotton textiles manufacturing and experienced rapid population growth. Łódź was largely spared the physical devastation of World War II, although Łódź's Jewish population—numbering about 160,000 in 1940—was interned in ghettos and then camps as part of the German occupation of Poland. With most of its infrastructure still in place, the mills and plants in Łódź were able to resume production rapidly after the war.^{72, 73, 74} Today, the Łódź economy is dominated by the industry, trade, vehicle maintenance, and IT-adjacent sectors. During the COVID-19 crisis, Łódź's economy managed to continue growth, with real estate particularly successful.^{75, 76, 77} Łódź is also home to numerous cultural and historical landmarks, museums, and other significant places of interest. The Łódź ghetto is now a landmark open to the public.⁷⁸

Kraków

Kraków is located in southern Poland and is one of the country's largest and oldest cities. The city has an area of 326.8 sq km (126.2 sq mi). While the city's existence can be traced back as far as the 10th century, it was not officially declared a city until 5 June 1257. Like Warsaw, it is bisected by the Vistula River. Kraków served as the original capital of Poland for almost 300 years, during which time it expanded rapidly in response to the burgeoning trade industry of the region. The city is home to thousands of historical buildings and landmarks, featuring architecture from medieval, Renaissance, and other distinct historical periods. Kraków's historical town center and the Wieliczka Salt Mine became UNESCO World Heritage sites in 1978.^{79, 80, 81}

Over the years, Kraków has cemented its status as a cultural, educational, and artistic hotspot within Poland. The Academy of Kraków was founded in 1364, the second oldest university in the region. Kraków retained its dominant status until 1611 when the capital was moved to Warsaw; its importance was further diminished by the Swedish wars of the 17th century and an anti-Russian insurrection that originated there in the 18th century. Austria maintained control of Kraków from 1795–1918 with a couple of exceptions in the 19th century when Kraków was claimed by the Duchy of Warsaw and the city declared independence in 1815. After World War I, the city was returned to Poland until World War II erupted and Germany occupied the region. It wouldn't be until 1945 that Kraków was liberated by rapidly advancing Soviet forces, which spared it from the level of destruction seen in other cities. The city quickly rebounded in the years after World War II with assistance from the Soviet Union, an ally of the Polish government. In addition to its cultural relevance, Kraków has become an industrial center for food processing, stonecutting, refineries, and manufacturing hubs.^{82, 83}

- 71 World Population Review, "Lodz Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/lodz-population/>
- 72 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Łódź," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, n.d., <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/Łódź>
- 73 Things to Do, "Top 10 Things to Do in Łódź, Poland," n.d., <https://www.thingstodopost.org/top-10-things-to-do-in-Łódź-poland-124341>
- 74 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Łódź," 31 March 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Łódź>
- 75 European Commission, "Internal Market, industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs – Lodzkie," n.d., <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regional-innovation-monitor/base-profile/lodzkie>
- 76 Center for Economics and Business Research, "Łódź and the Flat White Economy," 4 March 2019, <https://cebr.com/reports/lodz-and-the-flat-white-economy/>
- 77 Routes Online, "Lodz Economy is Growing Despite Epidemic," 10 June 2020, <https://www.routesonline.com/airports/6410/lodz-airport-central-poland/news/291761/lodz-economy-is-growing-despite-epidemic/>
- 78 Peggy Lee, "The Top 10 Things to See and Do in Łódź, Poland," *Culture Trip*, 9 February 2007, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/poland/articles/the-top-10-things-to-do-and-see-in-Łódź/>
- 79 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kraków," 1 November 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kraków>
- 80 World Population Review, "Kraków Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/Kraków-population/>
- 81 Discover Cracow, "Kraków Interesting Facts and Numbers," 25 October 2018, <https://discovercracow.com/Kraków-interesting-facts/>
- 82 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Kraków," 1 November 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kraków>
- 83 World Population Review, "Kraków Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/Kraków-population/>

Wrocław

Located in southwestern Poland, Wrocław is the fourth-largest city in Poland and a major industrial hub along the Oder River. The Oder divides Wrocław into 12 unique islands, which are connected by 130 bridges.⁸⁴ The land Wrocław sits on has an extensive history of human activity, but the city that would become known as Wrocław took shape in the 10th century as an integral stop along an amber trade route that connected it with western Europe. After centuries of conflicts, the city was seized by Prussia in 1741 and eventually became part of Germany. Renamed Breslau, the city remained part of Germany as it grew in size and stature until World War II. Upon Germany's defeat in 1945, Wrocław reclaimed its Polish heritage by rejoining Poland.^{85, 86, 87}

Wrocław had to be rebuilt after World War II due to the extensive damage it suffered; it is estimated that 90 percent of the city's industrial sectors, along with 70 percent of its residential areas, were either heavily damaged or destroyed during the war. In the years after World War II, new residential areas were erected and landmarks or historical institutions were reconstructed. Today, Wrocław is known for its Gothic architecture and as a center for technology, transportation, and flour milling.^{88, 89, 90}

Gdańsk

Gdańsk is a northern Poland city situated at the mouth of the Vistula River as it empties into the Baltic Sea by way of the Gulf of Gdańsk. The city encompasses an area of 262 sq km (101.2 sq mi). Gdańsk is part of the popular Trójmiasto urban region that also includes Gdynia and Sopot. Like many Polish cities, Gdańsk is home to a blend of historical, cultural, and industrial landmarks; it features 15th-century architecture and many museums and universities. Notoriously, the city is also the location where World War II began in Europe with the invasion of Poland through Gdańsk (called Danzig for a period) by Nazi Germany.⁹¹ Gdańsk has two major ports and is the starting point for the EuroVelo 9 cycling route.^{92, 93, 94}

Originating as a Polish city in the 10th century, Gdańsk became an autonomous municipality in 1260 and was seized by the Teutonic Knights in 1308. In 1466, Polish King Casimir IV recaptured Gdańsk; the city grew rapidly in size, stature, and population in the centuries afterward. Gdańsk achieved autonomy once again from 1919 to 1939 as part of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which instigated continual conflict between the city's legislative assembly and the Polish government that maintained operations within the city. In 1939, Gdańsk was used by Germany to justify its attack on Poland—kicking off the hostilities of World War II—after Poland refused to turn over possession of the city. Gdańsk was not spared the destruction of World War II and had to undergo full reconstruction to restore its historical buildings to their original state. Today, Gdańsk is one of Poland's major trade ports along with the ports in Świnoujście and Szczecin; in all, these ports collectively move approximately 50 million tons each year. These ports are some of the largest on the Baltic and connect Scandinavia with central

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- 84 Lonely Planet, "Wrocław is a Lively Idyll," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/poland/silesia/Wroclaw>
- 85 World Population Review, "Wrocław Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/Wroclaw-population/>
- 86 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Wrocław," 22 November 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Wroclaw>
- 87 Polish Tourism Organisation, "Wrocław," n.d., <https://www.poland.travel/en/cities/Wroclaw>
- 88 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Wrocław," 22 November 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Wroclaw>
- 89 Lonely Planet, "Wrocław Is a Lively Idyll," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/poland/silesia/Wroclaw>
- 90 Polish Tourism Organisation, "Wrocław," n.d., <https://www.poland.travel/en/cities/Wroclaw>
- 91 Michael Fry, "#tbt: Danzig and the Beginnings of World War II," National Geographic Education Blog, 28 August 2014, <https://blog.education.nationalgeographic.org/2014/08/28/tbt-danzig-and-the-beginnings-of-world-war-ii/>
- 92 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Gdańsk," 6 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gdansk>
- 93 World Population Review, "Gdańsk Population 2020," n.d., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/Gdansk-population/>
- 94 New World Encyclopedia, "Gdańsk," 23 May 2017, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Gdansk>

and Eastern Europe.^{95, 96} Gdańsk is the most popular city for tourism in the Trójmiasto tri-city area. Dubbed “the Pearl of the North,” Gdańsk features a thriving cultural and recreational scene that attracts as many visitors as Kraków and Warsaw.^{97, 98, 99}

Environmental Concerns

Poland’s rapid post-World War II industrialization has created significant pollution concerns in the more population-dense portions of the country. Pollution in Poland’s major rivers has been connected to an increase in various diseases within the population.^{100, 101} Water pollution from hazardous waste materials deposited into rivers has created adverse conditions. Coal is commonly used to heat homes and generates almost 90 percent of the electricity for the country. This dependence on coal has contributed to the manifestation of acid rain, which poses a serious threat to natural habitats and forests. In 2015, Poland was identified by the European Commission for being noncompliant with EU environmental regulations.^{102, 103}

Natural Hazards

Flooding poses a serious threat throughout Poland. The Vistula and Oder rivers are prone to flooding during the summer and winter months; to combat these threats, Poland has built numerous embankments, reservoirs, and relief channels to mitigate the risk. Severe flooding in 1997 devastated Poland with its largest flood on record and possibly the largest natural disaster in Poland’s history. In 2010, severe flooding caused rivers to reach their highest levels in more than a century.^{104, 105, 106}

Poland also has a history of tornado activity with recorded events as far back as two centuries ago. Tornadoes have destroyed buildings and infrastructure, killing animals and humans. Waterspouts have also been observed over the Baltic Sea or on Poland’s lakes. In 2008, Poland experienced an outbreak of tornado activity that killed at least three people.¹⁰⁷ Europe experiences approximately 300 tornadoes each year. With climate change, there is a potential for tornado activity to increase over time.^{108, 109}

95 Santander, “Poland: Exporting Products,” <https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/international-shipments/poland/exporting-products>

96 4 All Ports, “Swinoujscie Overview,” n.d., <http://www.4allports.com/port-overview-swinoujscie-poland-pid222.html>

97 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Gdańsk,” 6 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gdańsk>

98 City of Gdańsk, “About Gdańsk,” n.d., <https://www.Gdańsk.pl/en/about-Gdańsk>

99 Stay Poland, “Gdansk,” n.d., https://www.staypoland.com/about_gdansk.htm/

100 Poland Travel Guide, “Geography of Poland,” <http://polandtravelguide.org/geography-of-poland/>

101 Hans Roos et al., “Poland: Climate,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Climate>

102 OSAC, “Poland 2019 Crime & Safety Report,” 8 March 2019, <https://www.osac.gov/Country/Poland/Content/Detail/Report/3a89580c-512f-404b-9f9a-15f4aeb14091>

103 Central Intelligence Agency, “Poland,” *World Factbook*, 16 April 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

104 Central Intelligence Agency, “Poland,” *World Factbook*, 16 April 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

105 Climate Change Post, “Poland: River Floods Poland,” n.d., <https://www.climatechangepost.com/poland/river-floods/>

106 Earth Observatory, “Flooding in Poland,” NASA, 26 May 2010, <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/44082/flooding-in-poland>

107 BBC News, “Tornado Hits Poland,” 16 August 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7565187.stm>

108 Karolina Duszcyk, “Tornadoes Have Been Recorded in Poland for 200 years,” Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 18 May 2018, <http://scienceinpoland.pap.pl/en/news/news%2C29500%2Ctornadoes-have-been-recorded-poland-200-years.html>

109 Christian Du Brulle, “300 Tornadoes Hit Europe Every Year,” 24 May 2013, *EU Research & Innovation Magazine*, <https://horizon-magazine.eu/article/300-tornadoes-hit-europe-every-year.html>

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 1 | Geography, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Poland is a landlocked country with sparse natural water sources. | True | False |
| 2. | The Carpathian and Sudetes mountain ranges trace along Poland's southern border. | True | False |
| 3. | The Baltic Sea and Gulf of Gdańsk are popular recreational and tourist destinations in Poland. | True | False |
| 4. | The Oder River is a popular alternative for commercial transportation. | True | False |
| 5. | Kraków was virtually destroyed in the final years of World War II. | True | False |

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 1 | Geography, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Poland's Baltic Sea coastline forms a significant portion of its northern border. The country is also home to major rivers and numerous lake districts featuring thousands of lakes.
2. True:
The Outer Western and Outer Eastern portions of the Carpathians lie across Poland's border with Slovakia. The Sudetes chain sits along Poland's borders with the Czech Republic and Germany.
3. True:
The Baltic coastline and Gulf of Gdańsk offer visitors sailing, cycling, and many other watersport activities.
4. True:
The Oder has historically been a hotspot for trade, as it provides an alternative route for commercial activities through its waterway network of canals that connect with the Vistula.
5. False:
Kraków was spared the level of destruction seen in other Polish cities. The city quickly rebounded with assistance from the Soviet Union.

Chapter 2 | History



Castle ruins in Janowiec village.
Flickr / dr No. Adam Nowak

Introduction

Poland's history is complex and marked with periods of significant tragedy. The resiliency of the Polish people is evident at each stage of their history, starting in the ninth century when written records first mention the Polish people. The kings of the Piast dynasty embraced Roman Catholicism in the 10th century and expanded Poland's borders. A golden age under the Jagiellon dynasty led to a breakthrough where the nobility elected monarchs. Internal reforms stalled and decline set in as Poland had to contend with ambitious rivals like Sweden and Russia. In the 18th century, Poland's weakened status led to the country being partitioned out of existence between Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The nation reemerged after World War I and soon found itself threatened by both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. The horrors of World War II were followed by rapid reconstruction under a repressive communist regime. In 1989, democratic movements triumphed, and Poland embarked on a path towards European integration. Since 2015, a populist-led government has sought to consolidate power and impose a conservative vision for Polish society.^{1,2}

1 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

2 BBC News, "Poland Profile—Timeline," 28 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17754512>

Important Elements of History

Piast Dynasty

The exact origins of the Poles in central Europe remain a mystery. The name Piast comes from legends and unreliable records surrounding the accession of a plowman named Piast, possibly the dynasty's first ruler.³ Written records begin in the ninth century when the Slavic people—ancestors to modern Poles—settled into organized societies and established states. The Polanie and Wiślanie tribes, centered around modern Kraków, eventually consolidated power and assimilated tribes from smaller fractured territories. They coexisted until the Polanie absorbed the Wiślanie under Mieszko I, ultimately laying the groundwork for the Piast dynasty.⁴

By the 10th century, the dynasty controlled Great Poland and Mazovia in east-central Poland. Mieszko I, a Roman Catholic, brought Christianity to the dynasty. He later expanded his power by marrying the Bohemian princess Doubravka. He expanded the realm's territorial boundaries to include Pomerania, Silesia, and Little Poland. By the time Mieszko I died, the Polish state extended from the Baltic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains, similar to modern-day Poland.⁵ His son Bolesław I the Brave continued the dynasty's expansionist policies while bolstering its administrative and religious organizations.^{6, 7, 8}

In 1025, Bolesław I became king and rose to equal status among the other monarchs in Europe. Religious authority expanded as Holy Roman Emperor Otto III recognized Poland's independent administration and established an archbishopric in Gniezno and bishoprics in Kołobrzeg, Kraków, and Wrocław.^{9, 10} Culturally, the region remained unified and strong, even as regional control shifted and fractured in response to persistent political strife. In response, repeated calls were made to officially reunify the Polish kingdom. The Piast dynasty's territory waxed and waned in the centuries after Bolesław I's reign, in part because of divisiveness between regional rulers and the acting head of the dynasty. Without natural boundaries, they were also subject to persistent foreign and domestic skirmishes, attempted conquests, and invasions.^{11, 12}

Władysław I the Short, crowned king in 1320, ushered in a formal reunification of the kingdom. During Władysław's rule, Poland grew in strength and stature through alliances with Hungary and Lithuania. Władysław's son and successor Casimir III the Great continued this foreign policy by acting as arbiter between regional foes the Luxembourgs, Angevins, and Habsburgs, and resolving conflicts with Bohemia and the Teutonic Knights. Casimir's reign was one of remarkable success due to the unification and the codification of laws he oversaw. Poland underwent internal improvements as well, with a bolstered economy, military force, and administrative

3 Szymon Zdzieblowski, "DNA Research to Shed Light on Piast Dynasty History," Ministry of Science and High Education, 27 January 2020, <http://scienceinpoland.pap.pl/en/news/news%2C80495%2Cdna-research-shed-light-piast-dynasty-history.html>

4 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

5 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

6 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Piast Dynasty," 10 April 2008, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Piast-dynasty>

7 Every Culture, "Poles—History and Cultural Relations," n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Europe/Poles-History-and-Cultural-Relations.html>

8 Wojciech Oleksiak, "Learn the History of Poland in 10 Minutes," *Culture.pl*, 10 February 2016, <https://culture.pl/en/article/learn-the-history-of-poland-in-10-minutes>

9 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Bolesław I," 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Boleslaw-I>

10 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Otto III," 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Otto-III>

11 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Piast Dynasty," 10 April 2008, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Piast-dynasty>

12 Wojciech Oleksiak, "Learn the History of Poland in 10 Minutes," *Culture.pl*, 10 February 2016, <https://culture.pl/en/article/learn-the-history-of-poland-in-10-minutes>

infrastructure. A crowning and lasting achievement during this period was the establishment of the University of Kraków.^{13, 14}

Casimir died in 1370 as the last direct descendant in control of the dynasty. His nephew, Louis I the Great of Hungary, succeeded him. His lackluster reign was followed by his daughter Jadwiga and her husband, Lithuanian grand duke Jogaila. With this succession, the Piast dynasty formally ended, and the Jagiellon dynasty began with the creation of the Polish-Lithuanian state.^{15, 16}

Jagiellon Dynasty

The Jagiellon dynasty, which managed Bohemia, Hungary, and the Poland-Lithuania union, ushered in a golden age in the 15th and 16th centuries, during which Poland was the most powerful entity in central Europe. Attempts during this time to absorb Lithuania into Poland were unsuccessful, as Lithuania did not allow Polish land ownership or interference in Lithuanian affairs.¹⁷ The dynasty was not immune to the kind of infighting and strife that plagued its predecessor; nonetheless, the territory remained strong and grew under the leadership of Władysław III, who assumed the throne in 1440. His reign was brief—in 1444, he died fighting the Turks in the Battle of Varna; his brother Casimir IV promptly succeeded him.^{18, 19, 20}

Casimir's reign was part of a series of “new monarchies” in Europe. As one of the first multicultural states in the world, the Polish-Lithuanian state developed an early form of a democratic monarchy. Trade boomed as the demand for various goods and raw materials increased. Poland became a cultural center once the University of Kraków expanded its influence and attracted scholars and philosophers. Despite positive cultural and economic developments, Casimir's reign was marred by conflicts such as the Thirteen Years' War with the Teutonic Order and an overreliance upon taxation of nobles. In 1454, the Privilege of Nieszawa was established, which allowed provinces to control their taxes and levies. The Nihil Novi Act of 1505 limited the power of the king and established rule through the Sejm, a bicameral legislature. As the Sejm assumed responsibility for legislation, treasury, and foreign affairs, its cultural and political power grew. Militarily, Casimir was able to combat the Turks and temporarily defeat longstanding foes the Teutonic Knights, further expanding territory in the process. The dynasty experienced significant power shifts during the reigns of Casimir's successors, which allowed for renewed hostilities from old enemies like the Teutonic Knights.^{21, 22}

In 1506, the reign of Sigismund I the Old turned the tide in Poland's regional struggles by diplomatically resolving longstanding tensions with the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, a supporter of the Teutonic Order. By 1525, the Teutonic Order was soundly defeated and converted into a Polish fief. Sigismund I pushed for more political unity and significant cultural development—he is specifically credited with bringing Renaissance culture to Poland. The country maintained its reputation as an important cultural and educational destination during this period;

13 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Piast Dynasty,” 10 April 2008, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Piast-dynasty>

14 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

15 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Piast Dynasty,” 10 April 2008, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Piast-dynasty>

16 Wojciech Oleksiak, “Learn the History of Poland in 10 Minutes,” *Culture.pl*, 10 February 2016, <https://culture.pl/en/article/learn-the-history-of-poland-in-10-minutes>

17 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

18 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Jagiellon Dynasty,” 12 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jagiellon-dynasty>

19 Wojciech Oleksiak, “Learn the History of Poland in 10 Minutes,” *Culture.pl*, 10 February 2016, <https://culture.pl/en/article/learn-the-history-of-poland-in-10-minutes>

20 Every Culture, “Poles—History and Cultural Relations,” n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/Europe/Poles-History-and-Cultural-Relations.html>

21 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Jagiellon Dynasty,” 12 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jagiellon-dynasty>

22 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

notable figures of the era include astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus and “the father of Polish literature,” Jan Kochanowski.^{23, 24}

In 1569, the Union of Lublin officially established the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which united the two countries as one single state.²⁵ The Jagiellon dynasty did not survive much after Sigismund I’s reign; his only son, Sigismund II Augustus, became the final king and left the Polish-Lithuanian state with no direct heirs to rule. Additionally, the *szlachta* nobility class began advocating for the equal status of all the members in the commonwealth, taking inspiration from ancient Rome.²⁶ Poland rapidly progressed toward an elective monarchy—in which successive kings would be elected by the nobility—fundamentally changing the commonwealth forever.²⁷

28, 29

First Polish Republic

The First Polish Republic was established in May 1573 when Henri de Valois of France became the first elected king. His reign was short, however, as he abdicated the throne in 1574 to assume the throne in France.³⁰ Before leaving, however, Henri adopted the Henrician Articles, which established a contractual relationship between successive kings and the nobility. The articles guaranteed free elections once a king abdicates or dies, religious peace, the right of the Sejm to assemble, and the right of the people to renounce allegiance to the king if he broke the contract.³¹

In 1576, the prince of Transylvania Stephen Báthory was elected king. A career soldier, Báthory’s reign was characterized by several successful military campaigns against Russia and attempts to unite Poland with Muscovy and Transylvania.³² Báthory died in 1586 and was succeeded by Sigismund III Vasa, the grandson of Swedish ruler Gustav I Vasa. Sigismund’s tenure raised hopes of a union with Sweden. Despite Gustav’s immense popularity and his relationship with Sigismund, coupled with Gustav’s Roman Catholicism, prompted Sweden to declare itself a Lutheran country in part as a rebuff of Poland.³³

The deteriorating relationship between Sweden and Poland persisted for years and led to several skirmishes between the two countries, known as the Swedish Deluge. The enmity was eventually resolved with a fragile truce in 1655 and the signing of the Treaty of Oliva in 1660. Around the same time, Lithuania—led by the Radziwiłł princely family—broke ties with Poland in favor of a union with Sweden, a controversial move as Lithuania had undergone significant Polonization during its union with Poland.^{34, 35} Other threats loomed, such as the Battle of

23 Galicia Jewish Museum, “Timeline: History of Poland,” n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland,202>

24 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Jagiellon Dynasty,” 12 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jagiellon-dynasty>

25 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Union of Lublin,” 24 June 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Union-of-Lublin>

26 Arkadii Zhukovsky, “Nobility,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, 1993, <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CN%5CO%5CNobility.htm>

27 Galicia Jewish Museum, “Timeline: History of Poland,” n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland,202>

28 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Jagiellon Dynasty,” 12 April 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jagiellon-dynasty>

29 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

30 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Henry III,” 15 September 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-III-king-of-France-and-Poland>

31 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

32 Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine, “Stephen Báthory,” n.d., <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CS%5CT%5CStephenBI0thory.htm>

33 Henrik Enander et al., “Sweden,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 17 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sweden/The-early-Vasa-kings-1523-1611>

34 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Radziwiłł Family,” 27 April 2007, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Radziwill-family>

35 Kazimieras Meškauskas et al., “Lithuania,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 28 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lithuania/History#ref37337>

Vienna in 1683 and involvement in the Great Northern War, which ultimately weakened the Polish state's social and economic stability.^{36, 37, 38}

Poland's decline continued for decades. Stanisław II August Poniatowski was elected king in 1764 and would be the final king of Poland. Stanisław inherited a country politically pitted against itself as differing sides sought to reform. The Sejm believed strengthening its authority would result in a stronger nation, while Stanisław felt the only way to stop Poland's downward spiral was by strengthening the monarchy. Despite being at loggerheads over the best method of reform, Stanisław was able to implement modernization initiatives that improved virtually every sector of Poland.³⁹

Interference from neighbors—in particular Russia—undermined Stanisław's reform attempts. Russia convinced the Sejm to abandon reform and pursue transformation into a Russian protectorate; in response, a group of Polish nobles and gentry dubbed the Confederation of Bar rallied the intent of strengthening Poland's independence, undermining the monarchy, and resisting Russia's efforts. The confederation ultimately failed despite undermining Stanisław's authority, garnering international support, and inciting a civil war. By 1772, the Polish government was so fractured that Poland was unable to govern as a cohesive nation and had essentially broken down into autonomous principalities.^{40, 41}

Partitions

With the first partition authorized by the Sejm in 1772, Poland lost approximately one-third of its territory and population to Austria, Prussia, and Russia, with Russia receiving the largest parcel. With its new borders, Poland underwent a period of significant change known as the Great Sejm, four years of major structural and political reforms. On 3 May 1791, a constitution was adopted. However, this progress was short-lived—the Targowica Confederation, formed in Russia and with the support of Russia's military, successfully overturned the constitution and instigated a second partition in 1793. The second partition came about as Russian and Prussian forces overwhelmed Polish rebels and annexed the country's agricultural lands and industrial centers, virtually wiping out Poland's most significant economic sectors. During the warfare, the Russian army systematically massacred the people of Praga, a Warsaw suburb. A third partition occurred in 1795, again with the consent of the Sejm. Stanisław finally abdicated the throne, leaving for St. Petersburg as Russia increased its annexed portion of Poland to 65% of the territory and 45% of the population. Prussia absorbed at 20% of the territory and 23% of the population, while Austria acquired 18% and 32% respectively. With this third partition, Poland no longer existed as an independent state; what was left became known as the “Polish Question” for the next 123 years.^{42, 43, 44}

While the partitions virtually destroyed the Polish state, Polish activists never gave up on reforming and reclaiming their homeland. In the 19th century, several unsuccessful uprisings were staged by groups such as the Polish Socialist Party; a failed revolution occurred in 1905. These unsuccessful attempts did not deter Polish nationalist and cultural movements. In 1913, the Polish Peasant Party formed as part of the momentum that was spreading

36 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

37 Galicia Jewish Museum, “Timeline: History of Poland,” n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland,202>

38 Wojciech Oleksiak, “Learn the History of Poland in 10 Minutes,” *Culture.pl*, 10 February 2016, <https://culture.pl/en/article/learn-the-history-of-poland-in-10-minutes>

39 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

40 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Confederation of Bar,” 4 October 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Confederation-of-Bar>

41 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

42 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

43 Galicia Jewish Museum, “Timeline: History of Poland,” n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland,202>

44 Wojciech Oleksiak, “Learn the History of Poland in 10 Minutes,” *Culture.pl*, 10 February 2016, <https://culture.pl/en/article/learn-the-history-of-poland-in-10-minutes>

throughout the partitioned lands. A substantial opportunity finally arrived for Polish nationalists as World War I broke out in 1914.^{45, 46}

Second Polish Republic

World War I devastated Europe and significantly altered its internal borders. Polish fighters, estimated at around 2 million in all, fought on both sides of the conflict. While all sought Polish independence, the activists could not find common ground on how to achieve it. Revolutions in Russia and Germany provided further opportunities for independence. In January 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, as part of his Fourteen Points declaration for world peace, declared that it was necessary to reestablish the Polish state. After tense negotiations, the Second Polish Republic was established at the end of the war on 11 November 1918. This did not reunite all of the former territories, however—there was still much disagreement over what final form Poland would take.⁴⁷

The Paris Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles in 1919 would ultimately determine Poland's new borders: the country would reform with roughly the same borders from pre-partition, with the most significant difference being that Gdańsk would become an independent city known as Danzig. In April 1920, Poland allied with Ukrainian nationalists and seized much of Ukraine from Soviet Russia. The Soviets counterattacked to the outskirts of Warsaw but were pushed back after Poland received assistance from European powers, alarmed at the prospect of westward Soviet expansion. In the wake of the brief Russo-Polish War, the border between the two countries was solidified.^{48, 49, 50}

Reconstruction efforts were hampered by political infighting among camps led by the left-leaning Józef Piłsudski, a federalist, and the right-leaning Roman Dmowski, an “incorporationist” who sought the Polonization of ethnic groups in Poland.⁵¹ The two political forces struggled over the best path forward—Piłsudski sought to essentially recreate prepartition Poland while Dmowski sought to establish a state similar to the second partition's borders and the partial acquisition of East Prussia. In 1921, Poland adopted the March Constitution, formally establishing it as a democratic state. In 1926, Piłsudski led a coup d'état that resulted in the election of his colleague Ignacy Mościcki as president and the rapid implementation of restrictions on the Sejm. In April 1935, Piłsudski's political supporters adopted a new constitution that strengthened his allies and further limited the Sejm. Piłsudski died the next month, leaving Poland's internal politics in disarray. Despite these political and socioeconomic disruptions, Polish culture thrived during the second republic.^{52, 53}

The newly reformed country maintained an uneasy peace with most of its neighbors, although it was still subject to German and Soviet aggression. Caught between the two countries, Poland adhered to a policy of neutrality while also seeking strategic alliances. By 1934, Poland had signed nonaggression pacts with the Soviet Union (USSR) and Nazi Germany. The treaty with Germany meant little as Adolf Hitler expanded the regional power of Germany, eventually occupying Czechoslovakia and encircling a significant portion of Poland. Regional tensions escalated until they boiled over on 1 September 1939, when German forces—in cooperation with the Soviets—invaded Poland. On 17 September, the USSR followed suit and invaded from the east. By the end of the month,

45 Galicia Jewish Museum, “Timeline: History of Poland,” n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>

46 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

47 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

48 Galicia Jewish Museum, “Timeline: History of Poland,” n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>

49 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

50 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Russo-Polish War,” 30 July 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Russo-Polish-War-1919-1920>

51 Culture.pl, “Fathers of Polish Independence,” n.d., <https://musicbtm.com/fathers-of-polish-independence/>

52 Galicia Jewish Museum, “Timeline: History of Poland,” n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>

53 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., “Poland,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

the Polish government had fled to London, and the country was partitioned once again between Germany and Russia.^{54, 55, 56}

World War II

World War II officially commenced with Germany's invasion of Poland. By October 1939, the Polish resistance was effectively halted; the portions of Poland not directly annexed by Germany or the USSR became known as the general government. Hundreds of thousands of Polish military members were rounded up and sent to prisons or camps in the USSR; Soviet forces immediately executed 22,000 army officers.^{57, 58}

As World War II raged on in Europe, Germany ramped up its anti-Jewish campaign by forcing Polish Jews into ghettos as they constructed a series of concentration camps within the region. The invading forces began filling camps such as Auschwitz by mid-1940. The German-Soviet partition and partnership did not last very long; in June 1941, Germany turned against the Soviet Union as part of its expansionist policy known as Lebensraum, bringing all of Poland under control of the Third Reich.⁵⁹ With the region under its control, Germany implemented its plan to massacre European Jews. The transfer from ghettos to death camps was rapid; by July 1942, thousands of Jews were transferred daily. The Warsaw ghetto shrank from approximately 500,000 captives to roughly 55,000 by the end of the first series of transfers. Of those that remained, a resistance group calling itself Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (Jewish Fighting Organization) formed as word of the mass murders spread, intending to resist any further deportation efforts. On 19 April 1943, 750 Jewish fighters attacked German troops and police who had arrived to deport more captives. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—as it came to be known—lasted until 16 May 1943, when the fighters were overwhelmed by the German forces. Approximately 7,000 Jews were killed, and the rest were deported to various concentration camps.^{60, 61}

A Polish underground resistance force formed at the start of the war, operating a secret state to resist Nazi forces directly. Polish troops fought throughout Europe and North Africa on the land, sea, and in the air. The Polish resistance was notably instrumental in deciphering the Enigma ciphering machine. Soviet relations with the Polish government-in-exile were reluctantly reestablished upon Germany's adversarial shift against the USSR. The Soviets made guarantees to release captives and assist in the establishment of a Polish army, although they continued to pursue the annexation of Polish land. The Soviets also encouraged communist activities among the Polish, culminating in the creation of the Polish Workers' Party in 1942. Tensions between the Soviets and Poland boiled over with the discovery of mass graves in the Katyn Forest, where the Red Army had executed and buried 4,443 captured Polish officers in May 1940. Soviet premier Joseph Stalin denied responsibility and subsequently cut off all relations with the Polish government-in-exile.^{62, 63}

In July 1943, Polish prime minister Władysław Sikorski died in a plane crash, casting the government-in-exile into disarray. In 1944, the Polish army staged the Warsaw Uprising, in which they attempted to capture Warsaw ahead

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- 54 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>
- 55 Galicia Jewish Museum, "Timeline: History of Poland," n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>
- 56 Glenn E. Curtis, "Interwar Poland," *Poland: A Country Study*, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/poland/14.htm>
- 57 Galicia Jewish Museum, "Timeline: History of Poland," n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>
- 58 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>
- 59 Glenn E. Curtis, "Interwar Poland," *Poland: A Country Study*, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/poland/14.htm>
- 60 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," n.d., <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-warsaw-ghetto-uprising>
- 61 Michael Berenbaum, "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 12 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Ghetto-Uprising>
- 62 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>
- 63 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Katyn Massacre," 28 April 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Katyn-Massacre>

of the advancing Soviet army. The USSR purposely hindered the operation, however, allowing the Germans to suppress the rebellion. After 63 days, the city fell into Soviet control and was virtually destroyed, suffering more than 200,000 casualties.⁶⁴ Soviet aggression and interference ramped up in the latter days of World War II, culminating in the creation of the Provisional Polish Government of National Unity, which formally took control of Poland when Britain and the United States recognized it as the legitimate Polish government on 5 July 1945. Some Polish land was seized by the USSR, while some German land was turned over to Polish control.⁶⁵ This controversial decision led to massive Polish emigration and the birth of the Free Poland movement that would remain active for several decades.^{66, 67, 68}

People's Republic of Poland

Communist Poland was born in the aftermath of World War II. The mass expulsion of Germans and the relocation of portions of the population to the USSR created a homogenous Poland. Rigged parliamentary elections in 1947 overwhelmed the opposition parties into virtual nonexistence.⁶⁹ Poland's early transitional years were marked by social instability, armed skirmishes, and a concerted push for the Sovietization of the country. In 1952, the country solidified its shift to communism when it was renamed the Polish People's Republic. By 1955, Poland had joined the Warsaw Pact, which unified the military might of its members and allowed for the domestic presence of Soviet troops.⁷⁰

Civil unrest continued unabated for decades in the form of strikes in Poznań in 1956, student-led anti-communist protests in 1968, and food price riots in Gdańsk. Economically, Poland experienced some success during the 1970s; however, the communist era was more often marked with economic stagnation and periodic shortages of basic supplies. Socially, resistance to communist rule continued and reached a high point in 1978, when the Polish-born cardinal Karol Wojtyła was elected pope and assumed the name John Paul II. The pontiff visited Poland on numerous occasions and made his support for the country's anti-communist movement clear.^{71, 72, 73}

In 1980, the Solidarity trade union was founded in Gdańsk. Independent of the communist government, Solidarity was also a social activism group with ties to anti-communist groups. The government responded by attempting to suppress Solidarity's power and influence throughout the early 1980s. Solidarity leaders were arrested, and the group itself was officially banned as the communist government implemented martial law. Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983, the year that martial law was formally lifted. Negotiations spurred on by Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in the USSR during the mid-1980s resulted in the lifting of the ban on Solidarity, which won a landslide victory in the 1989 elections. Solidarity's overwhelming victory led to Lech Wałęsa becoming president and the creation of Poland's first non-communist government since World War II.^{74, 75, 76}

64 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Warsaw Uprising," 25 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Uprising>

65 BBC News, "Poland Profile—Timeline," 28 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17754512>

66 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

67 Glenn E. Curtis, "World War II," *Poland: A Country Study*, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/poland/15.htm>

68 Galicia Jewish Museum, "Timeline: History of Poland," n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>

69 Galicia Jewish Museum, "Timeline: History of Poland," n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>

70 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

71 Wojciech Oleksiak, "Learn the History of Poland in 10 Minutes," *Culture.pl*, 10 February 2016, <https://culture.pl/en/article/learn-the-history-of-poland-in-10-minutes>

72 Galicia Jewish Museum, "Timeline: History of Poland," n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>

73 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

74 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

75 Galicia Jewish Museum, "Timeline: History of Poland," n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland.202>

76 BBC News, "Poland Profile—Timeline," 28 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17754512>

Third Polish Republic

The 1990s were a time of reform as the Third Polish Republic shifted from communism to a free-market economy. As privatization progressed, Poland's annual inflation rate and budget deficit dropped significantly; its gross national product rose by the mid-1990s. The new government firmed up portions of the border with Germany and, by 1992, evacuated all Russian troops from the country upon the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. An abbreviated constitution featuring elements of Poland's 1952 constitution was adopted in 1992, followed by an official constitution adopted in 1997. While the overall reform process was slow and difficult, Poland made great strides toward becoming a full-fledged member of the international community by joining the Council of Europe, establishing ties with the European Union, and joining global trade organizations. In 1999, Poland joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against the wishes of Russia. Poland also formed the Visegrad Group with neighboring countries to coordinate cooperation within the region. In 2004, Poland was formally granted membership into the European Union.^{77, 78}

Recent Events

The general elections of 2005 brought about a stark political shift in Poland with the victory of the conservative Law and Justice party (PiS). Twin brothers and PiS leaders Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński assumed the roles of president and prime minister, respectively. The PiS victory was short-lived, however; after calling for an early parliamentary election in 2007, PiS was defeated by the center-right Civic Platform party, headed up by Donald Tusk.⁷⁹

In the 2000s, the Polish government partnered with the United States to build a missile defense system, which was interpreted as a rebuke of Russia. President Kaczyński's strong support of Georgia and Ukraine was also in contrast to Russia and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's interests. In 2010, it appeared that Putin wanted warmer relations with Poland as he became the first Russian leader to attend a ceremony commemorating the Katyn Massacre. Three days after the official memorial ceremony, however, President Kaczyński's airplane crashed near the Katyn massacre site, killing all on board. Polish and Russian experts concluded that the crash was an accident, though there is conflicting evidence that suggests the incident was intentional.⁸⁰ A special election was held in June, in which Civic Platform candidate Bronisław Komorowski was elected president.⁸¹

The 2011 parliamentary elections gave more power to the Civic Platform as Donald Tusk entered into a second term as prime minister, the first person to do so since the communist era. Tusk pushed forth a series of ambitious reforms, most significantly concerning Poland's pension system. Various scandals rocked the government, eroding popular support and culminating in a massive protest in 2013 through Warsaw for better employment opportunities and pay. In 2014, Tusk and his coalition narrowly survived a no-confidence vote. Later that year, Tusk resigned to become president of the European Council.^{82, 83}

The 2015 elections turned out in favor of PiS as Andrzej Duda won a narrow victory and seized the presidency. Duda set out to implement controversial reforms such as asserting PiS control over the media and judiciary

77 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

78 Galicia Jewish Museum, "Timeline: History of Poland," n.d., <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/timeline-history-of-poland,202>

79 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

80 Rebecca Flood, "Vladimir Putin Was Responsible for Plane Crash that Killed Polish President Lech Kaczynski, Says Polish Defence Minister," *Independent*, 15 December 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-polish-president-lech-kaczynski-plane-crash-russia-poland-defence-minister-antonio-a8111831.html>

81 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

82 BBC News, "Poland Profile—Timeline," 28 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17754512>

83 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

and imposing conservative Catholic values on society as a whole. These reforms have been met with periodic protests within Poland and with objections from E.U. authorities. In 2017, PiS member Mateusz Morawiecki rose to power as prime minister. The power PiS holds is fragile, however, as it lost control of the senate in the 2019 elections to center and center-left political parties.^{84, 85}

84 Jerzy A. Kondracki et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

85 BBC News, "Poland Profile—Timeline," 28 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17754512>

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 2 | History, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Christianity was introduced to Poland in the 10th century. | True | False |
| 2. | The First Polish Republic began when Poland transitioned to an elective monarchy. | True | False |
| 3. | World War II officially commenced with the invasion and partition of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union. | True | False |
| 4. | The Warsaw Uprising was a failed attempt by Polish forces to recapture Warsaw and prevent a Soviet takeover. | True | False |
| 5. | Poland was partitioned for a final time upon the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. | True | False |

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 2 | History, Assessment Answers

1. True:
Mieszko I, a Roman Catholic convert, brought the religion to the ruling dynasty during his reign. It remains the dominant religion in Poland today.
2. True:
In May 1573, Henri de Valois became the first elected king of Poland. Instead of kings selecting heirs, the Polish nobility would vote once a new king was to be crowned.
3. True:
By October 1939, virtually all Polish resistance had been halted, with large sections of the country annexed by either Germany or the USSR.
4. True:
In 1944, the Polish resistance staged the uprising, an attempt to recapture the city ahead of the Soviet army. However, deliberate interference from the Soviets ultimately led to the failure of the uprising.
5. False:
The Third Polish Republic formed in the aftermath of decades of communist rule. The overwhelming victory of the anti-communist group Solidarity provided the opportunity for Poland to shift to a free-market economy.

Chapter 3 | Economy



Buildings in downtown Warsaw.
Wikimedia / Skitterphoto

Introduction

Poland is the sixth-largest economy of the European Union (EU) and one of the bloc's most economically stable members. It is considered a business-friendly country thanks in part to its economic policies and its significant industry and services sectors. The collapse of the Soviet system necessitated a transition toward economic liberalization and a free market. Poland's economic transformation was painful at times. Still, the outcome has proven successful for the population and its healthy gross domestic product (GDP), which demonstrates the country's total market value of goods and services.¹ Recent restrictions on businesses and the implementation of new taxes have threatened to weaken these economic successes, though projections remain optimistic for the country's immediate future.²

1 Peter Bondarenko, "Gross Domestic Product," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 28 February 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gross-domestic-product>

2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

Agriculture

Agriculture remains a small but important part of Poland's economy, accounting for 2.4% of the GDP as of 2017.³ Today, around 30% of the rural population earns a living from the agricultural sector. During the Soviet era, Poland's agricultural output was largely provided by private farms, though the farms themselves remained relatively small at an average of 5 hectares (12 acres). Agriculture suffered a significant downturn once Poland transitioned from communism, and the industrial sector grew in stature. Food imports also increased, which forced the government to enact laws protecting the highly biodiverse wetlands and drainage basins from industrial development. These new laws and a severe drought in the early 1990s resulted in a steady drop in agricultural employment.^{4, 5} Poland has approximately 30.4 million hectares of land, of which the two most common economic uses are agriculture and forestry.⁶ Polish farms commonly raise livestock and vegetables. Agricultural products include fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy. Poland is one of the world's leading rye and potato producers; other prominent crops are wheat and sugar beets. Lower Silesia, the Little Poland Lowlands, Kujawy, Lublin, and the Vistula delta are the most fertile regions in the country.^{7, 8, 9}

Organic farming has grown in popularity in recent years. In 2018, Poland was home to more than 900 processors and 200 importers of organic products. The implementation of new regulations and organic product labeling requirements are expected to bolster the industry in 2021.¹⁰ Poland's timber industry is prominent yet beset by challenges—around one-third of the country's forests are marred by defoliation levels of more than 25%. The fishing industry is relatively small, producing 200,000–300,000 metric tons every year.^{11, 12, 13}

Industry

In 2017, the production and manufacturing industries accounted for 40.2% of Poland's GDP, second in prominence to the services sector.¹⁴ Poland's industrial sector is composed of operations in chemicals, natural resource extraction, machine-building, shipbuilding, and textiles. Industrial jobs employed 30.4% of the population in 2015. The industrial sector has demonstrated vitality, with a 7.5% overall growth in 2017.¹⁵ Poland is the sixth-largest manufacturing country in the EU; manufacturing accounts for 27% of its GDP. This sector consists of the production of automobiles, food and beverage, chemicals, clothing, machinery, textiles, and tobacco. The

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- 3 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>
 - 4 ICID, "Poland Population and Size of Farm Holdings," n.d., https://www.icid.org/v_poland.pdf
 - 5 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>
 - 6 Denene Erasmus, "Farming in Poland, Europe's Growth Engine," *Farmer's Weekly*, 9 January 2017, <https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/crops/field-crops/farming-in-poland-europes-growth-engine/>
 - 7 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>
 - 8 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>
 - 9 ICID, "Poland Population and Size of Farm Holdings," n.d., https://www.icid.org/v_poland.pdf
 - 10 Fresh Plaza, "Organic Farming in Poland," 27 March 2019, <https://www.freshplaza.com/article/9087206/organic-farming-in-poland/>
 - 11 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>
 - 12 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>
 - 13 ICID, "Poland Population and Size of Farm Holdings," n.d., https://www.icid.org/v_poland.pdf
 - 14 Economy Watch, "Poland Industry Sectors," 30 March 2010, https://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/poland/industry-sector-industries.html
 - 15 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

manufacturing industry began in earnest during Poland's communist era, although its administration and the quality of production were inconsistent during this period. The fall of communism devastated production at first, with a decline of 33% in all industrial sectors. Operations downsized in the mid-1990s while at the same time production methods and output improved. Production rose and fell before stabilizing in the 2010s when it accounted for between one-fifth and one-tenth of GDP. In 2018, the industrial sector overall grew by 5.8% as the government's initiatives to promote innovation created new opportunities.^{16, 17, 18}

Energy

The energy industry is a small but crucial element of the economy, responsible for around 3% of Poland's GDP.¹⁹ Energy—specifically electricity—is heavily dependent upon coal; Poland is the ninth-largest producer of coal in the world, producing more than 100 megatons of brown and hard coal each year. As of 2016, 79% of the country's electricity was derived from fossil fuels. Thermal plants fueled by bituminous coal and lignite were responsible for 90% of Poland's energy in the 2010s, with the remaining 10% derived from renewable sources. Most of Poland's coal product is consumed domestically for energy, making it the second-largest consumer of coal in Europe behind Germany. The Bełchatów Power Station in Łódź is the largest coal-based plant in Europe.^{20, 21} The coal industry once featured 84 shaft mines and four lignite mines. It underwent a downturn in the 1990s resulting from the cost of operations exceeding profits, which led to several permanent mine closures.^{22, 23}

Hydroelectricity has a long history in Poland but was shunned in the Soviet era; at the collapse of the communist government, most hydropower stations still in use predated World War II. Today, hydro energy accounts for 2% of the country's usage and is generated in 761 hydropower plants along the Vistula and Brda rivers and the Carpathian, Sudeten, and Vistula regions.^{24, 25}

Poland experienced a boom of oil production in the 1970s, but today most petroleum products are imported. The country's crude oil production averaged 21,000 bbl of crude oil and more than 554,000 bbl of refined petroleum products in the late 2010s. Imports of crude oil averaged 493,000 bbl and consumption of refined petroleum products topped out at more than 649,000 bbl for the same period. Poland also acts as a transit country for

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- 16 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Manufacturing," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>
- 17 International Trade Administration, "Poland: Advanced Manufacturing," U.S. Department of Commerce, 13 October 2019, <https://www.trade.gov/knowledge-product/poland-advanced-manufacturing>
- 18 Joseph Kipro, "The Biggest Industries in Poland," *World Atlas*, 6 February 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-industries-in-poland.html>
- 19 Polish Electricity Association, "The Contribution of the Polish Energy Sector to the Implementation of Global Climate Policy," December 2018, https://www.pkee.pl/file/repository/RAPORT_COP24_ENG_28_11_FINAL.pdf
- 20 Joseph Kipro, "The Biggest Industries in Poland," *World Atlas*, 6 February 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-industries-in-poland.html>
- 21 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>
- 22 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Minerals," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>
- 23 Glenn E. Curtis, "Poland: Natural Resources: Minerals and Fuels," *Poland: A Country Study*, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/poland/48.htm>
- 24 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Energy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>
- 25 B. Igliński, "Hydro Energy in Poland: The History, Current State, Potential, SWOT Analysis, Environmental Aspects," *International Journal of Energy & Water Resources*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42108-019-00008-w>

petroleum and similar goods between the Czech Republic, Germany, and Russia. Current crude oil proved reserves are 126 million barrels.^{26, 27, 28}

Small amounts of natural gas are extracted from the Baltic Sea and Upper Silesia. In 2015, Poland used 15 billion cubic m (530 billion cubic ft) of natural gas, of which approximately 70% was imported. A U.S. Energy Information Administration study in 2015 identified 4.13 trillion cubic m (146 trillion cubic ft) of recoverable gas resources in Poland. However, explorations of these reserves have not identified viable and accessible extraction points. Current natural gas proved reserves are 79.79 billion cubic m (2,818 billion cubic ft).^{29, 30, 31, 32, 33}

Natural Resources

Poland is home to a significant amount of natural resources, including various metals and minerals. Bituminous and brown coal are commonly mined, with the former mostly found in the Upper Silesian coalfield.^{34, 35} In addition to coal, Poland has significant deposits of sulfur; metallic minerals such as copper, rhenium, silver, and zinc; and nonmetallic minerals like barite, salt, and limestone. In Wieliczka, a salt mine has been in continuous operation since the 13th century and was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1978. Poland's minerals are either owned by the state or through private land ownership. All geological and mining activity is regulated by Poland's Geological and Mining Law of 2011.^{36, 37}

Trade

Poland's trade sector is relatively strong; in 2020, it rated 86.4 on the Heritage Foundation's trade freedom scale, firmly in the "free" category and above the world average of 73.9 at "mostly free."³⁸ In 2018, Poland ranked 18th in worldwide imports, accounting for USD 278 billion, and 23rd in global exports, accounting for USD 259 billion. Poland's trade sector oversees the import and export of automotive parts, chemicals, clothing and textiles, coal, food, machinery, and metals. Poland's balance of trade—the difference in value between imports and exports—has generally trended toward positive dividends in recent years. This sector has grown by 41.2% since 2008.^{39, 40} Trade in Poland underwent significant shifts after the collapse of communism. During the Soviet era, the Council

26 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Energy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

27 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

28 U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Poland," November 2016, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/POL>

29 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Energy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

30 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

31 U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Poland," November 2016, <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/POL>

32 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Minerals," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

33 Glenn E. Curtis, "Poland: Natural Resources: Minerals and Fuels," *Poland: A Country Study*, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/poland/48.htm>

34 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Minerals," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

35 Glenn E. Curtis, "Poland: Natural Resources: Minerals and Fuels," *Poland: A Country Study*, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/poland/48.htm>

36 K. Szamalek and M. Mlynarczyk, "Mineral Resources of Poland: Chapter 1: 3. Concession System," Polish Geological Institute National Research Institute Warsaw, 2017, http://geoportal.pgi.gov.pl/css/surowce/images/2017/pdf/mineral_resources_of_poland_2017.pdf

37 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Minerals," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

38 Heritage Foundation, "2020 Index of Economic Freedom: Poland: Trade Freedom," n.d., <https://www.heritage.org/index/visualize?cnts=poland&type=2>

39 Trading Economics, "Poland Balance of Trade," April 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/poland/balance-of-trade>

40 Observation of Economic Complexity, "Poland," n.d., <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/pol/>

for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) coordinated all of Poland's economic efforts and developments as it did for all countries that belonged to the Soviet bloc.⁴¹ Today, Poland's top trade partners are China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Russia.^{42, 43}

Services

The services sector—banking, communications, retail, among other subsectors—is the largest contributor to the economy, accounting for 57.4% of GDP in 2017.⁴⁴ Imports and exports of goods and services share an inverse relationship, with imports averaging -49.9% and exports averaging 54% in 2017. Estimates from 2015 show that 57.6% of the labor force is employed in services.^{45, 46}

Services underwent a sustained expansion period during Poland's transition to a free-market economy in the 1990s, averaging a 4% growth in the GDP each year. By 2010, that growth averaged 6% each year.⁴⁷ The financial services, retail, and travel sectors experienced the most significant growth of the period.⁴⁸

Tourism

Poland's natural beauty and historical landmarks make it an extremely popular tourist destination. After the fall of communism, tourism became a major player in Poland's economy. With their accession to the EU in 2004, the industry grew even stronger with access to tourism-specific funds. The Minister of Economic Development oversees the administration, regulation, and legislation required for the tourism industry. The budget for tourism reached USD 15.5 million in 2018 and is expected to see a nominal increase in 2020.^{49, 50, 51}

In 2016, Poland was the 16th most popular tourist destination in the world, and in 2018, it was the top tourist destination for Central and Eastern Europe, narrowly edging out Russia. The industry brought in USD 31.6 billion in 2018, demonstrating steady increases each year. That same year, Poland recorded 47.7 million tourists, up 3.9% from the previous year. Neighboring countries contribute the most tourist activity, with Germany often the leading contributor, followed by Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belarus, and Russia.⁵² The number of

41 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Comecon," 24 January 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Comecon>

42 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Trade," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

43 International Trade Commission, "Poland—Market Overview," U.S. Department of Commerce, 13 June 2019, https://www.export.gov/article?series=a0pt0000000PAuiAAG&type=Country_Commercial_kav

44 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Service Industry," 28 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/service-industry>

45 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

46 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Services," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

47 Wojciech Bogdan et al., "Poland 2025: Europe's New Growth Engine: 4. Services," McKinsey & Company, January 2015, https://www.mckinsey.com/-/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/economic%20studies%20temp/our%20insights/how%20poland%20can%20become%20a%20european%20growth%20engine/poland%202025_full_report.ashx

48 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Services," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

49 Joseph Kiprop, "The Biggest Industries in Poland," *World Atlas*, 6 February 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-industries-in-poland.html>

50 UNWTO, "Europe: International Tourist Arrivals and Tourism Receipts by Country of Destination," International Tourism Highlights, 2019, <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284421152>

51 OECD, "OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020: Poland," 4 March 2020, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/95c3e700-en.pdf?expires=1592870238&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=10A08178AA5BCDC20B3F024A70A0A247>

52 Monika Prończuk, "Foreign Visitors Spend Records Amount in Poland," Notes from Poland, 27 December 2019, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2019/12/27/foreign-visitors-spend-record-amount-in-poland/>

people employed within the industry is also increasing, although at a slower rate—approximately 195,675 people were employed in hospitality or catering positions in 2018.^{53, 54}

Banking and Finance

Banking

The banking sector is stable and resilient and the greatest overall contributing force to Poland's financial system. The currency in Poland is the Polish zloty (PLN), which had an exchange rate of PLN 1 to USD 0.25 as of June 2020.^{55, 56} The country is home to numerous commercial and cooperative banks; approximately 60% of the financial sector—and 83% of the banking sector—is composed of state-controlled or foreign banks.⁵⁷ In 2018, Poland had 32 commercial banks, 543 cooperative banks, and 31 credit institutions with assets totaling approximately USD 500.96 billion. The Polish Financial Supervision Authority oversees the national financial market.^{58, 59}

The Commission for Banking Supervision is an autonomous body that monitors Poland's financial and banking institutions under the purview of the National Bank of Poland.⁶⁰ The National Bank has had several roles throughout the country's history, its authority granted in the country's constitution. During the communist era, the bank administered the government's financial policies and managed the currency, investments, and business dealings of state enterprises. As Poland transitioned to a free-market economy, the bank transitioned into a central bank that regulates the banking sector and state currency.^{61, 62}

Finance

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into Poland has generally been increasing for the past two decades, with inflows of USD 13.2 billion in 2019. That same year, the country's total FDI stock was USD 236.5 billion, a 26% increase from 2010 levels. FDI is defined as investment across borders in which an investor from one economy significantly controls or influences a business enterprise in another economy. The primary recipients of FDI in Poland are the manufacturing, financial, and insurance activities and wholesale and retail sectors. The biggest investors are Germany, the United States, France, the Netherlands, China, and South Korea. A large population, economic stability, and affordable skilled labor make Poland attractive to foreign investors. The main perceived drawbacks to investment are restrictions on foreign ownership of certain companies and on foreign acquisition of real estate

53 UNWTO, "Europe: International Tourist Arrivals and Tourism Receipts by Country of Destination," International Tourism Highlights, 2019, <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284421152>

54 OECD, "OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2020: Poland," 4 March 2020, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/6b47b985-en.pdf?expires=1592866754&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=C3361DCFAD4896950C3E093EB98F34AD>

55 Xe Currency Converter, "1 PLN to USD = 0.254355," 23 June 2020, <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=PLN&To=USD>

56 UN Economic Commission for Europe, "Poland," n.d., <https://w3.unece.org/CountriesInFigures/en/Home/Index?countryCode=616>

57 World Bank, "Poland—Financial Sector Assessment," International Monetary Fund, 9 July 2019, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/600701562940025530/Poland-Financial-Sector-Assessment>

58 European Banking Federation, "Poland's Banking Sector: Facts & Figures," September 2019, <https://www.ebf.eu/poland/>

59 Banks.eu, "Economy and Banking Sector of Poland," n.d., https://thebanks.eu/countries/Poland/banking_sector

60 Corporate Finance Institute, "Top Banks in Poland," n.d., <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/careers/companies/top-banks-in-poland/>

61 European Banking Resources, "National Bank of Poland," n.d., <https://www.ecbs.org/banks/poland/national-bank-of-poland/view-details.html>

62 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Economy: Finance," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>

and the government's efforts to increase domestic ownership in the banking and retail industries.^{63, 64, 65} In 2020, Poland was ranked 40th out of 190 countries for ease of doing business.⁶⁶ It ranked 41 out of 198 countries in the 2019 Transparency International Corruption Index.⁶⁷

Standard of Living

The standard of living in Poland has seen significant growth since the 1990s. With long-term initiatives that encouraged macroeconomic stabilization, foreign investments and trade, and a burgeoning private sector, Poland was poised to recover relatively quickly from the collapse of its communist government. Membership in the EU also provided a standard of living boost for the country, as reflected in its rapidly growing GDP.⁶⁸ In 2019, Poland ranked 32 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index, which measures a country's standard of living based on key dimensions. With an index of 0.872, Poland has been trending steadily upward since 1990.^{69, 70}

Poland's health expenditures were 6.5% of GDP in 2017. The infant mortality rate is 4.3 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is two deaths per 100,000 live births.⁷¹ The top causes of premature death are ischemic heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, and lung cancer. The top risk factors that drive death and disability are ischemic heart disease, stroke, lower back pain, and falls.⁷² Poland's public health care system is underfunded. As the COVID-19 crisis spread in early 2020, Polish medical facilities experienced shortages of personal protective equipment; health care workers accounted for one-sixth of confirmed infections.⁷³

In 2018, 15.4% of Poland's population lived in poverty, with poverty defined as earnings below USD 1.90 per day. Since 2004, the poverty rate has generally been decreasing. Government social aid programs tend to focus on rural areas, where poverty is most prevalent.^{74, 75}

Private home construction and ownership rose dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s.⁷⁶ Estimates from 2017 indicate that 58.6% of Poland's GDP is accounted for by household consumption.⁷⁷ Household financial statuses demonstrated significant improvement since 2004, with an increase of 5% in the overall monthly available income

- 63 Santander Trade Markets, "Poland: Foreign Investment," June 2020, <https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/establish-overseas/poland/foreign-investment>
- 64 Trading Economics, "Poland Foreign Direct Investment," n.d., <https://tradingeconomics.com/poland/foreign-direct-investment>
- 65 Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, "Foreign Direct Investment," n.d., https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/foreign_direct_investment
- 66 World Bank, "Ease of Doing Business Rankings," May 2019, <https://www.doingbusiness.org/en/rankings>
- 67 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index: Poland," 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results/pol>
- 68 Gohar Vardanyan, "The Standard of Living of a Population: A Comparative Analysis of Armenia and Poland," Econstor, 2018, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/184462/1/cer-2018-0008.pdf>
- 69 UN Development Programme, "2019 Human Development Index Ranking," n.d., <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>
- 70 Poland.pl, "Poland's Standard of Living Rises Fast," 25 August 2016, <https://poland.pl/economy/investments-projects/polands-standard-living-rises-fast/>
- 71 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>
- 72 Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, "Poland," University of Washington, 2019, <http://www.healthdata.org/poland>
- 73 Dariusz Kalan, "Poland's Shortchanged Health Care System Is Already Straining," *Foreign Policy*, 6 April 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/06/poland-underfunded-health-care-system-straining-unprepared-coronavirus-pis/>
- 74 Koema, "Poland—Poverty Headcount Ratio at National Poverty Line," 2018, <https://knoema.com/atlas/Poland/Poverty-rate-at-national-poverty-line>
- 75 Miranda Garbaciak, "Top 10 Facts about Poverty in Poland," Borgen Project, 29 September 2018, <https://borgenproject.org/top-10-facts-about-poverty-in-poland/>
- 76 Andrew Hutchinson Dawson et al., "Poland: Housing," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/Economy#ref28249>
- 77 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

per capita between 2018 and 2019. Expenditures have also risen, but at a more gradual rate, while available income has widened the gap. In 2019, pensioners had the highest share of spending, coupled with the lowest available income, and farmers were reported to have the highest available income and lowest expenditure rates.⁷⁸

Employment

Poland boasts a stable labor force of approximately 16.1 million people—59% in services, 32% in industry, and 9% in agriculture as of 2019. About 45% of the labor force are women. Between 2018 and 2019, unemployment decreased, with the transportation, storage, information, and communication sectors the most affected. The average monthly wage in 2019 USD 1,242; the highest average wage was found in the information and communication sector with USD 2,131, and the lowest was USD 807 in accommodation and catering.^{79, 80, 81} Poland's employment growth was stunted by the COVID-19 crisis in early 2020.^{82, 83}

Unemployment has been trending downward in recent years, with occasional short periods of undulations. In January 2014, Poland's unemployment rate reached 14% after five years of consistent increases; the upward trend was halted in 2015, and by January 2020, the country's unemployment rate came in at 5.5.⁸⁴ Decreases in employment were reported in the financial, insurance, and real estate industries in 2019.⁸⁵ While the coronavirus pandemic caused a bump in unemployment, average wages reportedly rose for the same period in 2020.⁸⁶

Labor organizations within the region date back to the 1870s. In the 1980s, the Solidarity labor union asserted workers' independence from the communist state and led the effort to defeat the communist rule in 1989. Today, Solidarity and the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions are the two major union confederations, and approximately 12% of workers belong to a union. Solidarity has become a staunch supporter of the ruling PiS government, leading to a loss of confidence from some of its members. Solidarity's legendary founder Lech Wałęsa, an opponent of PiS, has cut ties with the union. A significant number of smaller unions are not affiliated with either of the two confederations.^{87, 88, 89}

78 European Statistical System, "Statistics Poland: The Situation of Households in 2019—On the Base of the Result of Household Budget Survey," 29 May 2020, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/living-conditions/living-conditions/the-situation-of-households-in-2019-on-the-base-of-the-result-of-household-budget-survey,12,19.html>

79 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Economy," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

80 UN Economic Commission for Europe, "Poland," n.d., <https://w3.unece.org/CountriesInFigures/en/Home/Index?countryCode=616>

81 European Statistical System, "Statistics Poland: Employment, Wages and Salaries in the National Economy in 2019—Preliminary Data," 17 June 2020, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/labour-market/working-employed-wages-and-salaries-cost-of-labour/employment-wages-and-salaries-in-the-national-economy-in-2019-preliminary-data,15,2.html>

82 Alan Charlish, "Polish Employment Falls More than Expected on Virus Fallout," *Nasdaq*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/polish-employment-falls-more-than-expected-on-virus-fallout-2020-06-18>

83 Budapest Business Journal, "Poland Employment Rate Declines, Average Wages Rise on Year in May," 22 June 2020, https://bbj.hu/region/poland-employment-rate-declines-average-wages-rise-on-year-in-may_184737

84 European Statistical System, "Statistics Poland: Unemployment Rate 1990–2020," 24 June 2020, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/labour-market/registered-unemployment/unemployment-rate-1990-2020,3,1.html>

85 European Statistical System, "Statistics Poland: Employment, Wages and Salaries in the National Economy in 2019—Preliminary Data," 17 June 2020, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/labour-market/working-employed-wages-and-salaries-cost-of-labour/employment-wages-and-salaries-in-the-national-economy-in-2019-preliminary-data,15,2.html>

86 Budapest Business Journal, "Poland Employment Rate Declines, Average Wages Rise on Year in May," 22 June 2020, https://bbj.hu/region/poland-employment-rate-declines-average-wages-rise-on-year-in-may_184737

87 Solomon B. Levine et al., "Organized Labour," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/organized-labor>

88 Wojciech Kość, "Teachers' Strike Causes Problems for Poland's Solidarity Labor Union," *Politico*, 4 October 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/teacher-strikes-causes-problems-for-polands-solidarity-labor-union/>

89 Worker-Participation.eu, "Poland: Trade Unions," 2013, <https://www.worker-participation.eu/National-Industrial-Relations/Countries/Poland/Trade-Unions>

Outlook

Poland's economic development has been remarkable and impressively stable since it transitioned to a free market in 1990. The country's large population, progressive policies, and low public debt levels are credited as the primary factors for its economic strength.⁹⁰ Poland's immediate economic future is not as optimistic as projections in previous years, as the country struggles to rebound from the substantial toll of the COVID-19 crisis. The GDP is expected to drop 7.4% in 2020 and rebound 4.8% in 2021 unless a second wave strikes the country and further damages economic activity. To address the effects of the pandemic, the Polish government has invested in financial support for many businesses, with a significant portion of the support nonrefundable. Poland plans to continue exploring initiatives that will enhance all aspects of the economy, from clean air programs to comprehensive support programs designed to mitigate health risks and protect the public.^{91, 92}

90 Joseph Kiprop, "The Biggest Industries in Poland," *World Atlas*, 6 February 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-industries-in-poland.html>

91 OECD, "Poland Economic Snapshot: Economic Forecast Summary," June 2020, <http://www.oecd.org/economy/poland-economic-snapshot/>

92 World Bank, "The World Bank in Poland," 16 April 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/poland/overview#1>

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 3 | Economy, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | Poland is the sixth-largest manufacturing country in the EU. | True | False |
| 2. | Hydroelectricity has long been a source of energy in Poland. | True | False |
| 3. | Poland is virtually devoid of natural gas deposits. | True | False |
| 4. | Poland's trade sector is healthier than the worldwide average. | True | False |
| 5. | The services sector is the largest contributor to Poland's GDP. | True | False |

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 3 | Economy, Assessment Answers

1. True:
Manufacturing accounts for 27% of GDP and consists of the production of automobiles, food and beverages, chemicals, clothing, machinery, textiles, and tobacco.
2. True:
Although shunned during the Soviet era, hydroelectricity has a long history of application in Poland. Hydropower plants are found along the Vistula and Brda rivers and the Carpathian, Sudeten, and Vistula regions.
3. False:
A study in 2015 identified 4.13 trillion cubic m (146 trillion cubic ft) of recoverable gas resources in Poland, although explorations of these reserves have not identified viable and accessible extraction points.
4. True:
In 2020, Poland's trade sector was rated 86.4 on the Heritage Foundation's trade freedom scale, above the world average of 73.9. The country also ranks 18th in global imports and 23rd in worldwide exports.
5. True:
The services sector—banking, communications, and retail—accounted for 57.4% of GDP in 2017. Estimates from 2015 show that 57.6% of the labor force is employed in services.

Chapter 4 | Society



A Corpus Christi holiday parade in Łowicz.
Flickr / Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland

Introduction

Today's Polish culture stands in stark contrast to its past. As Poland's boundaries waxed and waned over the centuries, new groups became part of the fabric of Polish culture. By the early 20th century, Poland had an ethnically diverse population that contributed to a multifaceted and cosmopolitan culture. This diversity was lost during World War II with the tragic events of the dual invasion by Germany and the Soviet Union, the Holocaust, and the ensuing forced migrations that transformed Poland into the primarily homogenous country it is today. Roman Catholicism remains the country's dominant religion, surviving centuries of partitions and attempts by rulers and governments to eradicate or undermine its influence on Polish culture. Despite extreme historical hardships, Poland has maintained a vibrant national identity that is celebrated in sports, arts, cuisine, and rich traditions.¹

¹ Norman Davies et al., "Poland," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

Ethnic Groups and Languages

While largely homogenous today, Poland does contain several minority ethnic groups. In addition to Poles, the country is also home to people of German, Silesian, and Ukrainian descent. Polish is the official language and is spoken by approximately 98.2% of the population as of 2011 estimates, with Silesian spoken by 1.4% and unspecified or other languages spoken by the remaining population.²

Before World War II, Poland had a multitude of ethnic communities—Belarusians, Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews—with Jews accounting for 10% of the total population. However, the war devastated the country and its people, causing massive casualties and migration. From the destruction emerged a largely homogeneous population of ethnic Poles with small groupings of ethnic minorities mostly concentrated in border provinces.^{3, 4}

Poles

In 2011, Ethnic Poles constituted 96.9% of the population.⁵ Written records indicate that Poles have existed in central Europe since at least the 10th century. The population size, language, and location of Poles has shifted dramatically throughout the country's turbulent history. Within Poland, five distinct cultural traditions evolved that developed into Polish dialects—Great Polish in the northwest, Kuyavian to the east, Little Polish near Kraków, Kashubian along the Baltic coast, and Górale in the south. A sixth distinct group of Poles is generally identified as those living abroad. For centuries, Poles have maintained a strong bond with Roman Catholicism, by far the most common religion of the group. Catholicism was strengthened in part through conflicts with Protestant Germans and Orthodox Russians. Today, an estimated 85.9% of the population is Catholic.⁶

Silesian

The Silesian people are Poland's largest ethnic minority, accounting for 800,000 people or 1.1% of the population as of 2011.⁷ The first records of this group detail the activities of Slavic people—specifically, a combination of the Dziadoszanie, Bobrzanie, Opolanie, and Ślężanie people—from a province named Silesia in southwest Poland. This province was ruled by various entities throughout history, starting with the prince of Bohemia, Boleslav II, who transferred ownership of the territory to the prince of Poland, Mieszko I, in the 10th century. Today, it is common for Silesians to identify as either Silesian or German, usually coinciding with their political affiliations. There is a strong Protestant religious presence in the Silesian city of Cieszyn.⁸ There is disagreement on whether Silesian is a fully realized language or if it is simply a dialect of Polish.^{9, 10}

2 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

3 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: Ethnic Groups," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

4 Curtis E. Glenn, "The Social Order," *Poland: A Country Study*, 1992, <http://countrystudies.us/poland/28.htm>

5 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

6 Andris S. Kreija, "Poland," *Every Culture*, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>

7 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

8 Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, "Who We Are: History," n.d., <http://old.luteranie.pl/eng/who.htm>

9 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Silesia," 21 October 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Silesia>

10 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: Ethnic Groups," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

German

Germans constitute the next largest group in Poland. In 2011, they numbered approximately 74,464, accounting for 0.2% of the population. The two countries' proximity and history of mutually gaining and losing territory account for the significant ethnic German presence in Poland. The largest concentration of Germans is along Poland's border with Germany.^{11, 12} Germans commonly adhere to either Roman Catholicism or Lutheran Protestantism.¹³

Other/Unspecified

Other ethnic groups present in Poland include Belarusians, Jews, the Lemko, and Ukrainians. Together, these smaller groups constituted 1.8% of the population in 2011. Before World War II, there were approximately 3 million Jews in Poland; after the war, that number fell to as low as 6,000 people. The concentration of Ukrainians in Poland is a reflection of the historical periods during which Poland controlled portions of modern-day Ukrainian territory. The Belarusian people are indigenous to Poland's northeast region, adjacent to present-day Belarus. The Lemko people are a small group that has historically endured hardships in Poland, as they lost their ancestral home after World War I, which forced them to assimilate into either the Ukrainian or Polish populations essentially. Lemko culture subsequently suffered from this and other forced depopulation events in the 20th century.^{14, 15, 16}

Religion

The Polish population overwhelmingly identifies as Roman Catholic; estimates from 2017 indicated that 85.9% of the population belonged to a Catholic denomination. Poland does not have an official religion but does guarantee religious freedom. Other religions practiced in Poland include various Christian denominations, Judaism, and Islam.^{17, 18}

Christianity

The Roman Catholic Church is highly revered in Polish culture. Approximately 99% of Polish children are baptized into the church, and it is estimated that 93% of Polish weddings follow Catholic traditions. During the Soviet era, maintaining one's Catholic faith was often considered a form of resistance to communism and a key part of the national identity. The election of the Polish-born Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II in 1978 and his subsequent support of anti-communist efforts in his home country further illustrated the power of Catholicism in the social and political realms.¹⁹

11 Minority Rights Group International, "World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Poland," July 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/poland/>

12 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

13 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Largest Ethnic Minorities in Poland," *World Atlas*, 18 July 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-minorities-in-poland.html>

14 Benjamin Elisha Sawe, "Largest Ethnic Minorities in Poland," *World Atlas*, 18 July 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-minorities-in-poland.html>

15 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

16 Andris S. Kreija, "Poland," *Every Culture*, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>

17 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

18 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: Religion," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

19 Brian Porter, "Catholic Church in Poland," University of Michigan, n.d., <http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/exhibits/roman-catholic-church/introduction>

Religious pilgrimages are popular in many cities, and many Catholic holidays are commonly celebrated. It is traditional for many farmers in rural areas to participate in agriculturally-minded religious activities with the hopes of guaranteeing a prosperous season. Many holidays in Poland originated from Roman Catholicism and feature specific celebrations and traditions. In the late 19th century, a distinct branch of Polish Catholicism established the Polish National Catholic Church overseas and today has more than 25,000 members throughout the U.S. and Canada.^{20, 21}

Judaism

Today, Jews in Poland make up less than 0.4% of the population, a stark contrast to the group's history in the region.²² Before World War II, Jews were Poland's largest minority group—some estimates show 3.5 million total—and were significant contributors to their communities and the Polish culture of the era. Jews have inhabited the region since the 10th century and shifted in size and autonomy in response to Poland's major historical events. By the end of World War II, it is estimated that up to 400,000 Polish Jews remained; this number steadily declined in the decades afterward, in part to the anti-Semitism that was rampant in the communist era.^{23, 24, 25}

While the Polish Jewish community lives in relative harmony today, it still faces some adversity from the Polish government. A controversial 2018 law made it a civil offense to accuse Poland of complicity in Nazi atrocities during World War II. The law originally characterized the offense as criminal and therefore carried the potential of imprisonment, but lawmakers reduced the severity after an uproar.²⁶

Other Religions

Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Muslims, and Latter-Day Saints make up less than 0.5% of the population. Muslims constitute a group roughly the same size as Jews and are concentrated in the eastern portion of the country, near Białystok. An estimated 12.1% of the population are unspecified or otherwise do not practice a religion.^{27, 28}

20 Andris S. Kreija, "Poland," Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>

21 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Polish National Catholic Church," 14 July 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Polish-National-Catholic-Church>

22 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

23 Facing History and Ourselves, "Jewish Life in Poland before the Holocaust," n.d., <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/resistance-during-holocaust/jewish-life-poland-holocaust>

24 JGuideEurope, "Poland," n.d., <https://jguideeurope.org/en/region/poland/>

25 Adam Easton, "Jewish Life Slowly Returns to Poland," BBC News, 20 April 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-radio-and-tv-17741185>

26 BBC News, "Poland Holocaust Law: Government U-Turn on Jail Threat," 27 June 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44627129>

27 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: People and Society," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

28 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: Religion," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

Cuisine

Poland has a long and rich culinary history with staples like meat, bread, and potatoes. Cereal grains are also a mainstay and are commonly grown on Polish farms.²⁹ Polish cuisine has formed over many centuries; it has notably absorbed influences from Jews in the Middle Ages and Asia and Crimea in the 1800s.³⁰ Potatoes are so popular that it is estimated each Pole consumes approximately 136 kg (300 lbs) of potatoes per year. Cool-weather crops such as beets, carrots, cabbage, and legumes are also common. Milk in various forms—butter, buttermilk, cheese, sour cream, sour milk, and whey—is also very common in Polish cuisine. Tea and coffee are common drinks for after meals; tea is more commonly consumed than coffee and is differentiated between loose leaf tea and those made from fruits and herbs.³¹

Popular Polish dishes include *czarnina* (duck soup), *barszcz* (red beet soup), pierogi dumplings, smoked seafood, and various meats like the popular kielbasa sausage, a Polish original. Vodka, cider, and *piwo* (beer) are common drinks during meals. Foods from gardens and forests, such as horseradish, currants, gooseberries, and mushrooms, often garnish dishes.^{32, 33, 34} It is common for meals to feature big portions of fried or stewed main dishes and numerous sides, often with opposing flavor profiles.³⁵

Traditional Dress

Polish traditional clothing has a history that reaches back more than a century and features approximately 60 variants based on region. The intricate, colorful details of Poland’s traditional costumes can be specific enough to indicate the village from which they originated.^{36, 37} Clothing can also indicate a person’s social status. Generally, a woman’s traditional costume will consist of variations in colors and patterns of the following: headgear, blouse, corset, apron, and skirt or dress; for men, typical garb includes a head covering, long-sleeved shirt, coat, trousers, and boots. While Poland’s traditional clothes were worn daily in the past, today, they are almost exclusively seen at festivals or national celebrations, except for some rural areas where traditional clothing is still worn as casual attire.^{38, 39, 40}

The Wilanów costumes, a popular form of traditional garb, emerged more than a century ago in the Warsaw region. This style features black embroidery in the upper portion coupled with ankle-length skirts for women, trousers for men, and an apron of various colors. Silk ribbons are often braided into women’s hair or men’s beards. Men

29 Food in Every Country, “Poland,” n.d., <http://www.foodbycountry.com/Kazakhstan-to-South-Africa/Poland.html>

30 Culture.pl, “A Foreigner’s Guide to Polish Cuisine,” 8 December 2014, <https://culture.pl/en/article/a-foreigners-guide-to-polish-cuisine>

31 Andris S. Kreija, “Poland,” Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>

32 Norman Davies et al., “Poland: Daily Life and Social Customs,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

33 Culture.pl, “A Foreigner’s Guide to Polish Cuisine,” 8 December 2014, <https://culture.pl/en/article/a-foreigners-guide-to-polish-cuisine>

34 Into Poland, “Polish Cuisine,” n.d., <https://www.intopoland.com/poland-info/polish-cuisine.html>

35 Karolina, “Polish Food: Complete Guide That Will Rock Your Tastebuds,” *Discover Cracow*, 5 September 2018, <https://discovercracow.com/polish-food/>

36 Culture.pl, “Polish Folk Fashion: Pure Joy!” 14 February 2014, <https://culture.pl/en/article/polish-folk-fashion-pure-joy>

37 Love the World, “Traditional Costumes—The Charm of Polish Culture (Part 1),” 1 June 2019, <https://www.1sttheworld.com/blogs/news/traditional-costumes-the-charm-of-polish-culture>

38 Culture.pl, “Polish Folk Fashion: Pure Joy!” 14 February 2014, <https://culture.pl/en/article/polish-folk-fashion-pure-joy>

39 Love the World, “Traditional Costumes—The Charm of Polish Culture (Part 1),” 1 June 2019, <https://www.1sttheworld.com/blogs/news/traditional-costumes-the-charm-of-polish-culture>

40 National Clothing, “National Dress of Poland. Delicate Lacing, Embroidery, Bright Stripes, and Impressive Headdresses,” 7 September 2016, <http://nationalclothing.org/europe/51-poland/121-national-dress-of-poland-delicate-lacing.-embroidery.-bright-stripes.-and-impressive-headdresses.html>

will commonly wear top hats or felt hats.^{41, 42, 43} The greater Kraków region is the birthplace of Western Cracovian style, which features long-sleeved tops with white embroidery around the collar, down the front, and at the sleeve cuffs.⁴⁴ The *sukmana* coat, often worn by the impoverished population, was also common in this area. Sukmanas can come in light or dark colors, are at least knee-length, and are adorned with subdued or minimal embroidery.⁴⁵ Polish hero Tadeusz Kościuszko, who led an uprising in 1794, famously hid from Russians by wearing a sukmana and blending in with the locals. In the 19th century, Sukmanas were subsequently incorporated into the uniforms of national insurgents.^{46, 47, 48}

Gender Issues

Poland is less gender-equal and making less progress toward gender equality than the European Union as a whole.⁴⁹ Historically, the role of gender in Poland was traditional—women were generally expected to care for and control a household while men worked and provided financially for the family. Even as more women were employed in the mid- to late-20th century, women were still expected to maintain the household. Despite their authority status in the home, women have not been considered equal. They have been subjected to domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, particularly in more impoverished communities. While Polish society has traditionally been male-oriented, recent social movements seek to create more balance and equality. In recent years, these movements have met resistance from the conservative government.^{50, 51}

Despite the communist-era emphasis on women’s education and employment, women still averaged less pay than their male counterparts; a study of wages from 1982 to 1993 found that women earned 66–67% of a man’s average wages. Women were employed in sectors like healthcare, social security, finance, education, and retail, where they commonly took roles in administration. In the political realm, women have yet to gain significant representation or leadership roles. The transition out of communism worsened the gender disparity; today, women make up less than half of the workforce and approximately 55% of all unemployed people.⁵²

The influence of the church is present in matters concerning reproductive rights. While the church did not endorse a 2007 attempt by conservative politicians to implement a total ban on abortions, it did voice support for a ban on in vitro fertilization (IVF) procedures. While the abortion ban was ultimately unsuccessful, the assumption of

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- 41 Culture.pl, “Polish Folk Fashion: Pure Joy!” 14 February 2014, <https://culture.pl/en/article/polish-folk-fashion-pure-joy>
- 42 Love the World, “Traditional Costumes—The Charm of Polish Culture (Part 1),” 1 June 2019, <https://www.1sttheworld.com/blogs/news/traditional-costumes-the-charm-of-polish-culture>
- 43 National Clothing, “National Dress of Poland. Delicate Lacing, Embroidery, Bright Stripes, and Impressive Headdresses,” 7 September 2016, <http://nationalclothing.org/europe/51-poland/121-national-dress-of-poland-delicate-lacing,-embroidery,-bright-stripes,-and-impressive-headdresses.html>
- 44 Roman K., “Costumes of Western Krakow Region,” Folk Costume & Embroidery, 26 May 2013, <http://folkcostume.blogspot.com/2013/05/costume-of-western-krakow-region.html>
- 45 Perfekt, “Krakow Costume—Elements Common for Many Regions of Krakow,” n.d., <https://www.perfekt.krakow.pl/costumes/krakow/white-krakow-sequined-overcoat-sukmana.199>
- 46 Culture.pl, “Polish Folk Fashion: Pure Joy!” 14 February 2014, <https://culture.pl/en/article/polish-folk-fashion-pure-joy>
- 47 Love the World, “Traditional Costumes—The Charm of Polish Culture (Part 1),” 1 June 2019, <https://www.1sttheworld.com/blogs/news/traditional-costumes-the-charm-of-polish-culture>
- 48 Lamus Dworski, “Quick Overview of Folk Costumes from Poland,” 20 November 2016, <https://lamusdworski.wordpress.com/2016/11/20/polish-costumes-overview/>
- 49 EIGE, “Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland,” 7 October 2019, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-poland>
- 50 Andris S. Kreija, “Poland,” Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>
- 51 Human Rights Watch, “‘The Breath of the Government on my Back’ Attacks on Women’s Rights in Poland,” 6 February 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/06/breath-government-my-back/attacks-womens-rights-poland>
- 52 Andris S. Kreija, “Poland,” Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>

power by the Law and Justice party in 2015 resulted in the elimination of IVF programs in 2017.⁵³ The ruling party also defunded the Women’s Rights Center—which aided victims of domestic violence—with the justification that it did not provide services for men who are victims of domestic violence.

Arts

Literature is considered, alongside Roman Catholicism, an essential element of the Polish identity and heritage. Poland’s tradition of literature began in oral form—folk songs, legends, poetry, jokes, and riddles. Early writings, dating back to the 10th century, were in Latin. The 16th century saw a literary “golden age” with the works of Mikołaj Rej, considered the father of Polish literature, and poet Jan Kochanowski.^{54, 55} The 19th and 20th centuries produced the famous poets Zygmunt Krasiński, Adam Mickiewicz, and Juliusz Słowacki, as well as writers Bolesław Prus, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Stefan Żeromski, Henryk Sienkiewicz, and Władysław Reymont—the latter two being recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature. World-renowned English-language writer Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), author of the novel *Heart of Darkness*, grew up in a Polish household in present-day Ukraine.^{56, 57, 58, 59}

During the communist era, the arts were subsidized by the government and required to produce propaganda materials. Some of the resulting artworks were either complex allegories or heavily laden with symbolism, as any perception of criticism toward the state could lead to censorship or arrest. An underground literature scene developed for a while, often delaying the mass availability of important works. Upon the collapse of communism, the strict censorship mostly faded away, allowing artists newfound freedom of expression.^{60, 61}

Traditional Polish music dates back to the Middle Ages. Generally, Polish music has remained mostly apolitical and, as a result, has not been subjected to as much censorship as other art forms. Religious themes were common in early works, often in the form of liturgical chants or hymns that praised Polish saints.⁶² Folk music and dance share a common history as they developed regionally over time; popular folk varieties include the *krakowiak*, mazurka, and polonaise. In 1794, Poland’s first major opera was staged in Warsaw.⁶³ Polish-French composer and pianist Frédéric Chopin (1810–49) is one of the major figures in Western music. His finely crafted and expressive piano works are emblematic of the Romantic era. Classical music—opera, symphony, chamber, and choral—has enjoyed a strong presence in Poland. Modern styles, such as pop or jazz, are also popular.^{64, 65, 66}

Live theater is a major art form in Poland. The first Polish theater was established in 1763, igniting the country’s love affair with the art form. Dramas were intensely popular until they were supplanted by comedies in the mid-

- 53 Andris S. Kreija, “Poland,” Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html> Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, “Polish Government Eliminates Program Covering In-Vitro Fertilization,” NPR, 6 April 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/04/06/522826565/polish-government-eliminates-program-covering-in-vitro-fertilization>
- 54 Halina Floryńska-Lalewicz, “Mikołaj Rej,” Culture.pl, April 2017, <https://culture.pl/en/artist/mikolaj-rej>
- 55 Halina Floryńska-Lalewicz, “Jan Kochanowski,” Culture.pl, January 2006, <https://culture.pl/en/artist/jan-kochanowski>
- 56 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Joseph Conrad,” 7 February 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joseph-Conrad>
- 57 Norman Davies et al., “Poland: The Arts,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>
- 58 Andris S. Kreija, “Poland,” Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>
- 59 Biography, “Joseph Conrad,” 20 August 2019, <https://www.biography.com/writer/joseph-conrad>
- 60 Norman Davies et al., “Poland: The Arts,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 July 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>
- 61 Andris S. Kreija, “Poland,” Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>
- 62 Maria Anna Harley, “The Briefest History of Polish Music,” Polish Music Center, University of Southern California, 18 December 1997, <https://polishmusic.usc.edu/research/publications/essays/briefest-history-of-polish-music/>
- 63 Jim Samson, “Cud Mniemany,” Oxford Music Online, n.d., <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000006314>
- 64 Norman Davies et al., “Poland: The Arts,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>
- 65 Andris S. Kreija, “Poland,” Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>
- 66 Arthur Hedley et al., “Frédéric Chopin,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 March 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frederic-Chopin>

to late-18th century. Franciszek Zabłocki (1752–1821) was an early influential playwright; his best-known work, *Flirting Dandy*, was a major hit. Ballet also emerged as a popular live art form, demonstrating influences from Polish folk dance traditions. Between the world wars, theatrical art was all but suppressed, and in the years after, attempts were made to transform it into a propaganda arm of the communist government with mild success. Upon the collapse of communism, theatrical arts underwent a revival.^{67, 68, 69}

Poland's film industry began in 1909 but was not internationally recognized in its early years. The communist government encouraged the industry's growth, subsidizing projects that ultimately offered anti-communist artists an avenue of expression through documentaries. Upon the collapse of communism, cinemas experienced a steep downturn; in the 1970s, there were approximately 2,500 movie theaters, a stark contrast to 1992 when less than 1,000 remained. Krzysztof Kieslowski is one of Poland's most famous present-day directors. In 1989, he received broad international acclaim for the 10-part series *Decalogue*, an exploration of morality and the human psyche set amidst decaying south-Warsaw apartment buildings. Kieslowski's *Ida*, a compelling portrayal of the clash between faith and secularism during the communist era, won the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film in 2015.^{70, 71, 72, 73, 74}

Poland's first radio station, Polish Public Radio, began AM operations in 1925; FM operations began in 1958 and have taken over in popularity. Today, Poland has more than 100 local and regional stations. Poland's first television program aired in 1952, although TV existed in an experimental form as early as 1937. Today, there are approximately 200 TV channels in the country.^{75, 76} Poland's National Broadcasting Council regulates radio and television operations.^{77, 78}

Sports and Recreation

Spectator and team sports are very popular pastimes in Poland. Soccer (football), in particular, is largely enjoyed throughout the country, as are skiing, mountaineering, cycling, sailing, horseback riding, and spelunking. Poles also enjoy recreational sports; many towns feature sports facilities for locals to use. The country has participated in the Summer and Winter Olympic Games since 1924. As of 2020, Poland has won 306 Olympic medals in 24 different sports.^{79, 80} The country's first Olympic gold medal winner, Halina Konopacka, won for discus in 1928 and famously assisted in the smuggling of Poland's gold reserves out of the country at the outbreak of World War II.⁸¹

67 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: The Arts," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

68 Andris S. Kreija, "Poland," Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>

69 Irena Kadulska, "Franciszek Zabłocki," Virtual Library of Polish Literature, n.d., <https://literat.ug.edu.pl/autors/zabloc.htm>

70 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: The Arts," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

71 Andris S. Kreija, "Poland," Every Culture, n.d., <https://www.everyculture.com/No-Sa/Poland.html>

72 Annette Insdorf, "'The Decalogue' Re-Examines God's Commands," *New York Times*, 28 October 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/28/movies/film-the-decalogue-re-examines-god-s-commands.html>

73 Rich Francis, "10 Polish Films You Need to Watch," Culture Trip, 15 November 2016, <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/poland/articles/10-polish-films-you-need-to-watch/>

74 Hollywood Reporter, "Oscars 2015: 'Ida' Wins Best Foreign Language Film," 22 February 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/oscars-2015-best-foreign-film-773880>

75 Polish Company TV, "History of Polish TV," 10 January 2020, <https://polishtvcompany.com/blog/the-history-of-polish-tv-in-numbers/>

76 Marcelina Szuba, "Television in Poland—Statistics & Facts," Statista, 3 March 2020, <https://www.statista.com/topics/5590/television-in-poland/>

77 Barry Mishkind, "Polish Broadcasting," Broadcast Archive, n.d., <https://www.olderadio.com/archives/international/poland.html>

78 KRRI, "History of the National Broadcasting Council," n.d., <http://www.krrit.gov.pl/en/krrit/about-the-national-broadcasting-council/history/>

79 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: Sports and Recreation," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

80 Olympian Database, "Polish Medals and Results in the Olympic Games," n.d., <http://www.olympiandatabase.com/index.php?id=28775&L=1>

81 Stuart Dowell, "Poland's First Olympic Gold Medal Winner Who Helped Smuggle Tonnes of Gold Out of Country During WWII Would be 120 Today," 26 February 2020, <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/going-for-gold-extraordinary-true-story-of-the-woman-who-saved-polands-gold-reserves-9292>

Soccer arrived in Poland in 1921, and by 1936, Poland's national team had a strong showing at the Summer Olympics. Poland first participated in the FIFA World Cup in 1938. By 1972, Poland's soccer team won gold in the Summer Olympics and then silver in 1976. Polish teams have been a constant in the FIFA World Cup and European soccer leagues.^{82, 83}

In the mountain ranges of southern Poland, snow sports and mountaineering are very popular activities. Several dozen resorts can be found throughout the mountainous region, with the most popular ski slopes in Zakopane, adjacent to the Tatra Mountains. Jakuszyce, close to the Czech border, is a hotspot for cross-country skiing.⁸⁴

Poland also has a tradition of lesser-known sports dating back to the Middle Ages. Many of these sports are regional and part of the cultural fabric. An early breakout sport was *palant*, played with a wooden stick and ball, bearing similarities to baseball.⁸⁵ Palant was popular enough in the 1800s to necessitate the creation of a governing body, the Organization of Palant Ball. Other popular recreational sports include *kapela*, in which players hit a small stack of stones with another stone; *kulanie kulotka*, in which players roll a wooden disk with a stick; and *ringo*, in which players throw a ring back and forth on a rectangular court.⁸⁶

82 In Your Pocket, "History of Polish Football," 14 March 2020, https://www.inyourpocket.com/warsaw/History-of-Polish-football_72886f

83 Norman Davies et al., "Poland: Sports and Recreation," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 27 June 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland>

84 Polish Tourism Organisation, "Skiing and Snowboarding," n.d., <https://www.poland.travel/en/experience/skiing-and-snowboarding>

85 Robert Wood, "Palant," Topend Sports, March 2016, <https://www.topendsports.com/sport/list/palant.htm>

86 European Commission Education and Culture DG, "Traditional Polish Sports and Games," n.d., http://www.ghs-mh.de/traditions/topics/health/sports_pl.htm

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 4 | Society, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | Ethnic Germans make up roughly a third of Poland's population, a reflection of the contentious history between Germany and Poland. | True | False |
| 2. | Poland's Jewish population dropped from 3 million to 300,000–600,000 after the events of World War II. | True | False |
| 3. | Polish folk clothing is regional and features more than 60 variations. | True | False |
| 4. | The <i>sukmana</i> is a ceremonial cap worn by Poles during weddings. | True | False |
| 5. | Literature is the most prominent art form in Poland. | True | False |

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 4 | Society, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Ethnic Germans constitute only about 0.2% of Poland's population. The events of World War II left Poland a largely homogenous society.
2. True:
Jews inhabited the region starting in the 10th century and grew in prominence over the centuries. The Holocaust devastated the Jewish population in Poland; today, it is estimated that as few as 6,000 Jews currently live in Poland.
3. True:
Polish folk clothing often features common traits such as embroidery, aprons, and long garments. Women will commonly braid silk ribbons into their hair while men will do the same with their beards.
4. False:
A *sukmana* is a coat that was traditionally worn by impoverished people. It typically came in darker colors, was at least knee-length, and featured simple embroidery.
5. True:
Poland's literary tradition dates back to oral literature such as folk songs, legends, poetry, jokes, and riddles. Literature is highly celebrated and considered an essential element of Polish identity.

Chapter 5 | Security



Polish special forces participating in a NATO exercise.
Wikipedia / Allied Joint Force Command Brunsum

Introduction

Poland is one of the most politically and economically stable countries in Europe. It maintains warm relations with many of its neighbors, is an active participant in the European Union (EU) and NATO, and its law enforcement and armed forces organizations are well-developed and effective. The country does face numerous threats and aggression, such as an aging population, the continued pollution of its waters, a deteriorating relationship with Russia, and the rapid rise of cyberattacks. Despite its economic strengths, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted virtually every aspect of life in Poland and threatens to erode its sustained economic successes.¹

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Military and Security," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

U.S.–Polish Relations

Poland and the United States enjoy a strong relationship, with the former considered a significant ally in central Europe. The two countries have collaborated on NATO capabilities, counterterrorism, nonproliferation, missile defense, human rights, and several economic matters. A testament to the strength of this relationship can be seen in the combined number of summits, task forces, and multinational headquarters that Poland has hosted because of its NATO membership. Poland has also assisted the U.S. in military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, and countries where significant terror organizations operate. Poland hosts approximately 4,500 U.S. troops and has participated in joint military exercises within the region. The U.S. has assisted Poland's military by selling aircraft and various defense equipment to them in recent years. The U.S. has also funded enhancements to Polish military facilities as part of the European Deterrence Initiative; this funding was also intended to help facilitate and maintain the U.S. troop presence in the region. In 2018, the United States announced its consideration of establishing a military base in Poland, a proposal welcomed by Polish leadership.^{2,3}

Poland's economic strength has made it an attractive place for U.S. businesses to explore—enough so that the U.S. is Poland's largest non-EU investor. Poland, in turn, is the top trade partner for the U.S. in central Europe. Imports from Poland to the U.S. reached new heights with USD 13.4 billion in 2019. The U.S. and Poland also have a double taxation treaty, which prevents individuals and companies in both countries from being taxed twice for their income.⁴ Another defining characteristic of their relationship is centered around science and technology; in 2018, the two countries renewed their Science and Technology agreement to strengthen their cooperation in both fields further.^{5,6}

The U.S. and Poland have maintained diplomatic relations since 1919 when the U.S. became one of the first countries in the world to recognize Poland's independence after World War I. Poland's years as a Soviet satellite complicated and stalled relations until the 1970s when Poland made a concerted effort to improve their relationship. Since the collapse of communism, the relationship has been warm and strong, with Poland firmly established as one of the United States' key military and economic allies in the region.^{7,8,9}

2 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, "U.S. Relations with Poland," U.S. Department of State, 10 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-poland/>

3 John Pike, "U.S.-Polish Relations," GlobalSecurity.org, 19 March 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-forrel-us.htm>

4 Lawyers Poland, "US-Poland Double Taxation Treaty," 12 April 2016, <https://www.lawyerspoland.eu/us-poland-double-taxation-treaty>

5 Office of Treaty Affairs, "Poland (18-1128) – Agreement for Scientific and Technological Cooperation," U.S. Department of State, 28 November 2018, <https://www.state.gov/18-1128/>

6 Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, "U.S. Relations with Poland," U.S. Department of State, 10 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-poland/>

7 John Pike, "U.S.-Polish Relations," GlobalSecurity.org, 19 March 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-forrel-us.htm>

8 Gov.pl, "Poland in US," n.d., <https://www.gov.pl/web/usa-en/bilateral-relations>

9 Daniel Fried, "Poland, America, and a New West," Atlantic Council, 21 October 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/poland-america-and-a-new-west/>

Relations with Neighbors

Poland shares its borders with seven countries in the region: Belarus, Czech Republic, Germany, Lithuania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and the Russian territory Kaliningrad. Its border with the Czech Republic is its longest, and the one shared with Lithuania is its shortest. The eastern border has the most crossings of any EU country in the region; in recent years, there has also been an increase of smuggling activities across Poland's borders, prompting a stronger presence of police at the borders.¹⁰

Belarus

Poland and Belarus have shared a hot and cold relationship since the fall of communism in the region. While Poland has occasionally acted as an intermediary for Belarus with the EU, they have been unable to form a strong, stable alliance. Their relationship is complicated by Russia's influence over Belarus and the country's political instability. In 1991, the two countries signed a treaty and declaration detailing their intent at mutual collaboration and friendship, but this optimistic beginning was soon complicated by unrest in Belarus throughout the mid-1990s. Belarus has appeared increasingly resistant to improve the relationship; one such reason is the existence of the Pole's card, an identification card that the Belarusian government feels is an attempt by Poland to meddle in their affairs.^{11, 12}

The current Poland-Belarus border was established in 1946 and has remained even after the collapse of communism; it has been called the EU-Belarus border since Poland's accession to the EU in 2004. Within Belarus, Poles are the second-largest minority group, behind the Russians. Partially in response to the unstable relationship between the two countries, Poles in Belarus organized the Union of Poles advocacy group to seek fairer treatment from the government. The controversial group, with more than 20,000 members, has not been able to achieve much reform. Belarus has pointed to border reform as a path towards cooperation between the two countries.^{13, 14, 15, 16}

Despite a rocky diplomatic history, potential has arisen that the two countries can find common ground to build on. Belarus maintains a strong trade relationship with Poland, exporting various minerals, chemicals, woods, and metals. Poland, in turn, exports various agricultural products, machinery, equipment, metals, and chemicals to them. Poland currently maintains three diplomatic missions in the Belarusian cities of Brest, Grodno, and Minsk; Belarus also maintains diplomatic missions in Białą Podlaska, Białystok, Gdańsk, and Warsaw. It is estimated that approximately 48,700 Poles live in Belarus.^{17, 18, 19}

10 Joseph Kipro, "Which Countries Border Poland?" World Atlas, 14 May 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-poland.html>

11 Joseph Kipro, "Which Countries Border Poland?" World Atlas, 14 May 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-poland.html>

12 Andrei Yeliseyeu, "The Poland–Belarus Relationship: Geopolitics Gave New Impetus, but no Breakthrough," EAST Center, n.d., http://east-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Poland_Belarus_relationship_Yeliseyeu.pdf

13 Joseph Kipro, "Which Countries Border Poland?" World Atlas, 14 May 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-poland.html>

14 Igar Gubarevich, "Three 'Thorns in the Flesh' of Belarus-Poland Relations," Belarus Digest, 15 November 2016, <https://belarusdigest.com/story/three-thorns-in-the-flesh-of-belarus-poland-relations/>

15 Polandin.com, "PM Praises 'Strong patriotism of Poles in Belarus,'" 28 July 2018, <https://polandin.com/38272810/pm-praises-strong-patriotism-of-poles-in-belarus>

16 Sjarhel Pulsha, "Belarus and Poland: A Difficult Balance," The Ukrainian Week, 14 August 2018, <https://ukrainianweek.com/World/218222>

17 Eastern Partnership, "The Polish Relationships with Belarus," n.d., <http://www.easternpartnership.org/relationships-belarus.html>

18 Andrei Yeliseyeu, "The Poland–Belarus Relationship: Geopolitics Gave New Impetus, but no Breakthrough," EAST Center, n.d., http://east-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Poland_Belarus_relationship_Yeliseyeu.pdf

19 Igar Gubarevich, "Three 'Thorns in the Flesh' of Belarus-Poland Relations," Belarus Digest, 15 November 2016, <https://belarusdigest.com/story/three-thorns-in-the-flesh-of-belarus-poland-relations/>

Czech Republic

Relations between the Czech Republic and Poland reach far back in history to medieval times. Their shared border, which stretches more than 800 km (497 mi), has allowed for a strong cultural exchange over the centuries. Legends uphold their cultural connection, such as the tale of two brothers named Čech and Lech, who were the ancestors for Czechs and Poles, respectively. The events of World War II drove a significant wedge between the two groups; this rift was slowly mended in the decades after, as the two countries, along with other regional dissidents, maintained a secret collaboration while the area was dominated by Soviet rule. The collapse of communism provided a reset of sorts for relations, as both Poland and the Czech Republic could now renew and expand their diplomatic efforts.^{20, 21}

The two countries' path to regional and international stages mirrored each other as together they joined the Visegrad Group in 1991, NATO in 1999, and then the EU in 2004.^{22, 23, 24} Both countries also share the same energy burden—namely, a strong reliance on Russian oil and gas. This reliance on Russia, often at odds with both countries, has instigated calls for a strong Czech-Polish alliance, though nothing concrete has yet manifested. One issue Poland and the Czech Republic have found strong common ground on is the matter of refugees; both countries oppose mandatory relocation of refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the EU.^{25, 26} A potentially explosive incident occurred during the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 when Polish forces crossed into Czech territory as part of overall lockdown operations in response to the pandemic. The Polish government informally apologized to the Czech government, assuring that there was no hostile intent and that it was an accident, which was generally accepted by the Czech Republic.²⁷

Germany

As with other neighboring countries, Poland's relationship with Germany has a complicated, tragic history that is a stark contrast to relations today. Germanic and Slavic tribes have roughly inhabited their respective regions for centuries, with the German people participating in the partitions of Poland that eventually all but eradicated the country. World War II started the most troubling period of Poland-Germany relations when the Nazis and the Soviet Union invaded, conquering all of Poland in six weeks and changing Poland forever; the Soviet Union quickly transformed Poland into a satellite state. Under the influence of communism post-World War II, Poland fostered a strong anti-German sentiment. Opportunities to mend their relationship emerged as Poland's anti-communist resistance groups gained momentum; Germans sent food parcels to Poles in the aftermath of the violent suppression of the Solidarity trade union. The destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989 allowed for rapid improvements in relations kicked off with a new Poland-Germany border agreement.²⁸

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- 20 Radio Prague International, "Czechs and Poles: A Special Relationship," 18 April 2010, <https://english.radio.cz/czechs-and-poles-a-special-relationship-8574652>
- 21 The Visegrad Group, "Brief History of Poland," 2019, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/basic-facts-about/poland/brief-history-of-poland>
- 22 Visegrad Group, "History of the Visegrad Group," n.d., <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/history/history-of-the-visegrad>
- 23 NATO OTLAN, "Member Countries," 24 March 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm
- 24 David R. Cameron, "The Challenges of EU Accession for Post-Communist Europe," Center for European Studies, n.d., <http://aei.pitt.edu/9273/1/Cameron.pdf>
- 25 Josef Mlejnek Jr., "Poland and Czech Republic – Interests or Common Weaknesses," Aspen Review, January 2012, <https://www.aspenreview.com/article/2017/poland-and-czech-republic-common-interests-or-common-weaknesses/>
- 26 Kafkadesk, "Czech-Polish Relations Should Move 'Beyond Anti-refugee Rhetoric,'" 7 January 2019, <https://kafkadesk.org/2019/01/07/czech-polish-relations-should-move-beyond-anti-refugee-rhetoric/>
- 27 Tom Embury-Dennis, "Poland Accidentally Invades Czech Republic and Annexes Part of Neighbour's Territory," Independent, 13 June 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/poland-czech-republic-border-invasion-military-annexation-coronavirus-lockdown-a9564376.html>
- 28 Spiegel International, "A History of Betrayals," 18 June 2007, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/german-polish-relations-a-history-of-betrayals-a-489527.html>

The new beginning for Poland in Germany upon the collapse of the Soviet empire was met with the understanding that both countries would ensure their relations adhered to the overall process of European integration. In 25 years, their relationship has developed in a generally favorable manner, as both countries shared very similar goals. In recent years, there have been some cracks in their relationships, primarily over migration. Economically, Germany's social market economy is attractive to Poland, which in turn has allowed Germany to achieve economic and political goals in its relationship with Poland. Their economic cooperation is one of the strongest aspects of their relationship.²⁹

Recent indications show some deterioration in their overall relations. In 2018, 44% of Germans considered their country's relationship with Poland to be bad, with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project standing as a large point of contention. The proposal is an extension of the Nord Stream pipeline, which transports natural gas from Russia; Nord Stream 2 remains unfinished as of July 2020. Another point of contention is the matter of reparations, which the ruling party Law and Justice (PiS) demands on behalf of Poland for the destruction caused during World War II. Germany rejects the idea of reparations given that Poland renounced its claims to them in 1953. Today, the relationship is arguably weaker than it has been since the fall of the Berlin Wall.^{30, 31}

The border between Poland and Germany extends 467 km (290 mi) in all, which was established in 1945 in the aftermath of World War II. Their traditional border traced along the Neisse and Oder rivers, though it shifted greatly over the centuries. Their borders are highly populated; it is estimated that approximately one million people live along their shared border, which is open because of the Schengen treaty that abolished most border controls in participating European countries. Within Poland, it is estimated that there are upwards of 350,000 Germans.^{32, 33}

Lithuania

Poland and Lithuania more than 400 years of history; from the 14th to the 18th centuries, they were united through the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.³⁴ The Soviet era separated the two countries but as was the case with many other neighbors, an opportunity to establish relations arose once communism collapsed. Despite initial efforts to rebuild bilateral relations, both countries ran into cultural complications along the way concerning the treatment of Lithuanian and Polish minorities living across the border. Regional security has proven to be one of the strongest bonding issues between the two countries in response to the looming threat of Russia. Together with Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland established a trilateral brigade to support regional peacekeeping and defense. The pending exit of the United Kingdom from the EU, a strong Poland ally, has deepened the desire to stabilize relations with Lithuania and other neighbors. Recent diplomatic efforts have focused on strengthening economic, energy, and security matters.^{35, 36, 37}

29 Rafał Ulatowski, "German-Polish Relations. Political and Economic Aspects," UNISCI Journal, January 2016, <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-78913/UNISCIDP40-3RafalUlatowski.pdf>

30 Notker Oberhäuser, "Polish-German Relations: The Sticking Points," Deutsche Welle, 6 April 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/polish-german-relations-the-sticking-points/a-44074544>

31 Piotr Buras, "Divided at the Centre: Germany, Poland, and the Troubles of the Trump Era," European Council on Foreign Relations, 19 December 2018, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/divided_at_the_centre_germany_poland_and_the_troubles_of_the_trump_era

32 Joseph Kiprop, "Which Countries Border Poland?" World Atlas, 14 May 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-poland.html>

33 Federal Foreign Office, "Germany and Poland: Bilateral Relations," 12 June 2020, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/poland/227880>

34 Antony Jameson, "A Short History of Poland & Lithuania," Stanford University, n.d., http://aero-comlab.stanford.edu/jameson/world_history/A_Short_History_of_Poland_and_Lithuania.pdf

35 China-CEE Institute, "Lithuania is Joining Poland to Celebrate an Anniversary of the Historical Union and Reinforce the Relations," 9 July 2019, <https://china-cee.eu/2019/07/09/lithuania-external-relations-briefing-lithuania-is-joining-poland-to-celebrate-an-anniversary-of-the-historical-union-and-reinforce-the-relations-2/>

36 Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, "Relations between Lithuania and Poland Gain Momentum," 17 February 2018, <https://www.lrp.lt/en/press-centre/press-releases/relations-between-lithuania-and-poland-gain-momentum/29455>

37 Paweł Pawłowski, "Warmer Relations Between Poland and Lithuania," Warsaw Institute, 28 May 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/warmer-relations-poland-lithuania/>

Lithuania is located along the northeastern border of Poland, totaling 105 km (65 mi). The border area is Poland's shortest and known as the Suwalki gap, named after a nearby town. This border was formally established in 1990 upon Lithuania's independence, although it existed during the communist era but was the border between Poland and the Soviet Union. Today, there is no border control because of the Schengen treaty.³⁸

Slovakia

Slovakia and Poland have sustained friendly relations in the region, anchored in security matters and their mutual memberships in international organizations. Both countries followed similar recovery paths postcommunism and are now members of the Visegrad Group, NATO, and EU. Both countries have worked together to assist neighbors in the region with various reforms and initiatives. The Slovakia-Poland border measures 539 km (335 mi) in all.^{39, 40, 41}

Ukraine

Poland's current border with Ukraine was established after the Polish-Ukrainian War in 1919. During the Soviet era, Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union and as a result, the border was heavily restricted and policed. The current border was formally recognized in 1992 with the collapse of communism in the region.⁴² Upon Ukraine's independence in 1991, Poland was the first state to formally recognize it.⁴³ Their relationship today is defined by a desire for cooperation in the region, anchored in their proximity, shared history, and Poland's status within the EU as well as its strong economy. At one time, Ukraine considered Poland a "gateway to the West."⁴⁴

Both countries have also strengthened their alliance around a common threat—Russia. Despite common interests and recent efforts to strengthen their alliance, progress has been hindered by lingering wounds from World War II and internal strife in Ukraine, which has been further complicated by Poland's EU membership obligations and interference from Russia.^{45, 46} These hindrances have not affected migration; in recent years, Poland has become a popular destination for Ukrainian immigrants. This migration was generally welcomed by the Polish government as the influx of Ukrainians helped alleviate the loss of skilled laborers that departed Poland for work in other countries. There has been some pushback on the influx of Ukrainians by Poles in some areas.^{47, 48} The COVID-19 crisis in 2020 rapidly complicated this relationship, however, resulting in approximately 143,000

38 Joseph Kipro, "Which Countries Border Poland?" World Atlas, 14 May 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-poland.html>

39 Explore Poland, "Geography," 24 June 2007, <http://www.explore-poland.pl/Geography/Geography.html>

40 The First News, "Poland, Slovakia to Support Ukraine in its Reforms," 16 September 2019, <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/poland-slovakia-to-support-ukraine-in-its-reforms-7656>

41 Joanna Dyduch, "Poland and Slovakia: Bilateral Relations in a Multilateral Context (2004-2016)," 2017, <https://books.google.com/books?id=z0UwDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT71&dq=Slovakia-Poland%20relations&pg=PT71#v=onepage&q&f=false>

42 Joseph Kipro, "Which Countries Border Poland?" World Atlas, 14 May 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-countries-border-poland.html>

43 B. Kravtsiv et al., "Poland," Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine, 1993, <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CP%5CO%5CPoland.htm>

44 Ian J. Brzezinski, "Polish-Ukrainian Relations: Europe's Neglected Strategic Axis, Survival, 1993, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339308442697>

45 Andrzej Szeptycki, "Poland-Ukraine relations," University of Warsaw, January 2016, <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-78913/UNISCIDP40-4AndrzejSzeptycki.pdf>

46 Gabriela Baczynska, "Poland says War-Time Killings Tarnish Ties with Ukraine," Reuters, 11 July 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-ukraine/poland-says-war-time-killings-tarnish-ties-with-ukraine-idUSKBN1K12J5>

47 Shaun Walker, "'A Whole Generation Has Gone': Ukrainians Seek a Better Life in Poland," The Guardian, 18 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/18/whole-generation-has-gone-ukrainian-seek-better-life-poland-elect-president>

48 Claudia Ciobanu, "Poland's Tepid Welcome to Ukrainians Leaves Economy Vulnerable," Reporting Democracy, 3 March 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/03/polands-tepid-welcome-to-ukrainians-leaves-economy-vulnerable/>

Ukrainians departing Poland at the beginning of the pandemic despite Poland's assurances that Ukrainians would be allowed access to their healthcare system.⁴⁹

Russia (Kaliningrad)

Kaliningrad has had a storied history in which it has, at times, belonged to Germany, Poland, and currently Russia. It exists as an enclave in which 209 km (130 mi) shares a border with Poland as part of the Lithuania-Poland-Russia tri-point that terminates at the Baltic Sea. This border is one of the busiest in the region with five active road crossings. This border has been recognized for centuries as regional powers shifted; after World War I, the Treaty of Riga established it as a boundary for the Soviet Union and was retained after the collapse of communism. Today, it's considered a border for the EU and Russia after Poland joined the EU in 2004.^{50, 51}

Poland's history with Russia is complicated and marked by periods of warfare, corruption, and tragedy, most notably the invasion by the Soviet Union in collaboration with Nazi Germany that sparked World War II. Russia took advantage of the destruction of Poland during the war and aided in the transformation of Poland into a communist state after the war ended. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Poland's relations with Russia were estranged and difficult. Economically, Poland is a significant trade partner with Russia and there are calls to expand and explore limited business opportunities in Kaliningrad.⁵² Attempts to improve relations around 2010 were complicated by the death of Polish president Lech Kaczyński in a plane crash during a visit to Russia to commemorate the anniversary of the Katyń Massacre carried out by Soviets during World War II.⁵³ The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 also made Poland hesitant to improved diplomacy, while Poland's membership in the EU and NATO have also proven to be significant roadblocks for Russia. In 2020, the Russian ambassador in Poland characterized the relationship between the two countries as "the worst since the end of WWII."^{54, 55, 56}

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- 49 Joana Hosa and Oleksandra Iwaniuk, "The Coronavirus Crisis: An Opportunity to Mend Polish-Ukrainian Relations," European Council on Foreign Relations, 17 April 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_coronavirus_crisis_an_opportunity_to_mend_polish_ukrainian_r
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- 53 Polandin.com, "Poland Marks 10th Anniversary of Smolensk Crash," 4 April 2020, <https://polandin.com/47513861/poland-marks-10th-anniversary-of-smolensk-crash>
- 54 Joanna Plucinska, "Poland Sees Limited Room for Russia Diplomacy, Despite Macron Overtures," Reuters, 13 December 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-russia-macron/poland-sees-limited-room-for-russia-diplomacy-despite-macron-overtures-idUSKBN1YH1YA>
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- 56 Polandin.com, "Polish-Russian Relations Worst Since End of WWII: Ambassador," 18 February 2020, <https://polandin.com/46705413/polishrussian-relations-worst-since-end-of-wwii-ambassador>

Police

Law enforcement is generally carried out by two major organizations: the national police (*Policja*) and municipal guards (*Straże Miejskie i Gminne*), with several smaller agencies with limited scopes of operation. The Ministry of Internal Affairs administers police services for Poland. Created with the Police Act of 1990, the national police are tasked with protecting the public and enforcing law and order. Structurally, the police force is organized in units: the criminal police, investigative police, internal affairs police, preventative police, logistical support police, judicial police, and counterterrorism units. As Poland emerged from communist rule, the municipal guards were initially created to be a “counterweight” to the national police and ensure that the needs of local communities were met. The municipal guards have less authority than the national police—notably, they do not have the power to arrest and handle misdemeanors.^{57, 58, 59}

The judiciary branch of the criminal justice system administers the courts system and encompasses the supreme court and common, administrative, and military courts. The prosecution branch performs duties associated with safeguarding the rule of law and general law enforcement. Poland’s border guard was established in 1990 and is charged with the defense of the Polish border, territory, and enforcement of immigration control.⁶⁰ The border guard also participates in counterterrorism activities. The Internal Security Agency is responsible for intelligence activities, which replaced the Office of the Protection of the State in this role in 2002. The agency is responsible for internal security matters such as terrorism, espionage, smuggling, trafficking, corruption, and other national matters. Poland’s prime minister oversees the operations of the Internal Security Agency. As of 2018, Poland boasted approximately 99,000 full-time police officers.^{61, 62, 63}

Military

Poland’s armed forces is composed of three main branches—the Polish Land Forces, Polish Air Forces, and the Polish Navy, with special forces and territorial defense forces with specialized roles. These services are further divided regionally, operating out of Kraków, Pomerania, Silesia, and Warsaw. Compulsory military service was enforced until 2008 when the program was ended, though there have been instances when the Polish government has considered reinstating it due to growing regional threats. Currently, men and women ages 18-28 are eligible for voluntary service, either on a permanent or contract basis. As of 2016, the Polish armed forces numbered approximately 117,000 personnel as of 2019. Military expenditures accounted for 2% of the GDP in 2019.^{64, 65, 66, 67}

57 OSCE Polis, “Country Profile: Poland,” n.d., <https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/poland>

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63 Adriana Sas “Number of Full-Time Employed Police Officers in Poland from 2010 to 2018,” Statista, 5 September 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1031403/poland-number-of-police-officers/>

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66 GlobalSecurity.org, “Poland – Military Personnel,” 6 May 2016, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-personnel.htm>

67 Central Intelligence Agency, “Poland: Military and Security,” *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

Polish Land Forces

The Polish army boasted a force of 61,000 permanent and contract personnel as of 2019. This military branch is the largest of all in the Polish armed forces. During the current army's early years of formation, most of its compulsory recruits originated from Poland's cities, as many students received deferments. In 1999, the Polish armed forces joined NATO, which saw the rapid integration and adaptation of the army to NATO standards. Conscription ended in 2008 after having been an active policy for 90 years. Poland hopes to grow its land forces to 150,000 soon.^{68, 69, 70} The land forces boast an inventory of 1,069 various tanks, 2,547 various armored vehicles, and hundreds of self-propelled artillery and rocket projectors.⁷¹

Polish Air Forces

The Polish air forces counted 18,500 permanent and contract personnel in all as of 2019. The air force's primary mission is to defend Polish airspace and has been integrated into NATO as part of Poland's membership. When standing up the current air force, early warning and force integration were top priorities for the branch. The air force is divided into three major divisions: the air force for flying units, ground-based air defense forces for hostile air assaults, and radar forces for reconnaissance and radar support.^{72, 73} The air force boasts 457 aircraft in all, varying numbers of fighters, transports, trainers, helicopters, and special mission crafts.⁷⁴

Polish Navy

The Polish navy had approximately 7,000 permanent and contract personnel as of 2019. The navy is structured to carry out fast attack and patrol functions in the Baltic Sea. Poland also maintains a small contingent of coast guard personnel who are subject to potential integration with the navy during wartime.^{75, 76} The navy has 87 vessels in all—frigates, corvettes, submarines, patrol boats, and mine warfare vessels. Faced with an aging fleet that includes some vessels leftover from the Soviet era, Poland has explored acquisition options from neighboring allies.^{77, 78}

Polish Special Forces and Territorial Defense Forces

The special forces, territorial defense forces (TDF), and other armed forces groups numbered approximately 31,000 as of 2019—3,500 in special forces, 14,000 in territorial defense forces, and 13,500 in other roles. Poland's special forces command as formed in 2007 and is headquartered in Kraków; it oversees the special forces units GROM, Formoza, and other smaller groups. The TDF is considered a fifth branch of the armed forces and

68 GlobalSecurity.org, "Poland – Military Personnel," 6 May 2016, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-personnel.htm>

69 GlobalSecurity.org, "Poland – Land Forces," 3 August 2017, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-army.htm>

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71 Global Firepower, "Poland Military Strength (2020)," n.d., https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=poland

72 GlobalSecurity.org, "Poland – Air Force," 3 August 2017, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-af.htm>

73 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Military and Security," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

74 Global Firepower, "Poland Military Strength (2020)," n.d., https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=poland

75 GlobalSecurity.org, "Poland – Navy," 27 May 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-navy.htm>

76 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Military and Security," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

77 Global Firepower, "Poland Military Strength (2020)," n.d., https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=poland

78 Jaroslaw Adamowski, "Poland Could Buy Swedish Submarines to Update its Kobben-class Fleet," *Defense News*, 27 November 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2019/11/27/poland-could-buy-swedish-submarines-to-update-its-kobben-class-fleet/>

is tasked with complementing operations of the other branches, the defense and deterrence of Poland, and assisting NATO operations.^{79, 80, 81}

Cybersecurity

In 2018, Poland ranked 17 regionally and 29 out of 175 globally on the Global Cybersecurity Index.⁸² Poland has seen a significant uptick in cybersecurity incidents in recent years, peaking at 6,484 incidents in 2018—almost twice as many experienced the year before.⁸³ The National Cybersecurity System Act of 2018, a joint effort by the National Security Agency and Minister of National Defense, seeks to coordinate efforts to address cybersecurity incidents within their purview. The energy, transportation, financial, digital infrastructure, and healthcare sectors are the most affected by cybersecurity laws and regulations in Poland. Cybersecurity incidents are logged and published in a publicly available bulletin; the Polish Telecommunications Act requires services providers to inform customers of any risks or breaches.^{84, 85}

Poland is an active participant in EU cybersecurity organizations and initiatives. The country has sought to enhance its domestic, regional, and global partnership on cybersecurity in recent years.⁸⁶ The ministry of digitization has enacted an ambitious cybersecurity strategy that will allocate more resources to combat the rising cyberattacks; this strategy coincides with the European Council's Cybersecurity Act, which established a uniform cybersecurity certification scheme for EU member countries.^{87, 88}

Issues that Affect Stability

While relatively stable, Poland does face several social, political, and economic challenges in the coming years. Despite having one of Europe's strongest economies, the country's aging society threatens to disrupt the overall labor force and strain the healthcare and pension systems.⁸⁹ The economy is rapidly growing, but high unemployment and relatively low wages encouraged many working-age Poles to move abroad for better opportunities.^{90, 91} The COVID-19 worldwide crisis is expected to disrupt the economy and workforce significantly; unemployment in 2019 was 3.3%, but current estimates predict that it could increase to 9.9% due to the

79 GlobalSecurity.org, "Poland – Special Forces Command," 6 May 2016, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/pl-personnel.htm>

80 Central Intelligence Agency, "Poland: Military and Security," *World Factbook*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>

81 Republic of Poland, "Territorial Defence Forces," n.d., <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/territorial-defence-forces>

82 International Telecommunication Union, "Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI)," 2019, https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2018-PDF-E.pdf

83 Adriana Sas, "Number of Cyber Security Incidents Handled by CERT* in Poland from 1996 to 2019," Statista, 14 July 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1028557/poland-cybersecurity-incidents/>

84 OSCE Polis, "Country Profile: Poland," n.d., <https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/poland>

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87 Anne Chatham, "Government Launches New Cybersecurity Strategy to Keep High-Tech Threats at Bay," The First News, 12 August 2019, <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/government-launches-new-cybersecurity-strategy-to-keep-high-tech-threats-at-bay-7126>

88 Polandin.com, "Polish PM Approves Cyber-Security Strategy 2019-24," 29 October 2019, <https://polandin.com/45092125/polish-pm-approves-cybersecurity-strategy-201924>

89 Egle Fredriksson, "How Poland's 'Golden Age' of Economic Growth is Going Unreported," Euronews, 25 June 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/25/how-poland-s-golden-age-of-economic-growth-is-going-unreported-view>

90 Anthony Csillas, "4 Economic Challenges Facing Poland in 2019," Investopedia, 20 October 2018, <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/011416/3-economic-challenges-poland-faces-2016.asp>

91 Alexandra Brzozowski et al., "EU Country Briefing: Poland," Euractiv, 15 April 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/eu-country-briefing-poland/>

pandemic.⁹² Pollution remains a grave threat to all aspects of life in Poland, as the country is home to 33 of Europe's most polluted cities. PiS remains somewhat popular as they push a controversial nationalist agenda that is accused of undermining Poland's democracy. Depending on what policies PiS can enact, they could run afoul of the EU, risking sanctions.^{93, 94}

Water Security

Because of its geography, Poland is susceptible to flooding and suffered devastating floods in the past. Global climate change threatens to intensify this problem as well as affect national and international trade, the availability of fresh water, food production, and inspire climate-induced migration.⁹⁵ Pollution remains a significant problem with Poland's lakes, rivers, and the Baltic Sea; despite recent efforts to reduce pollution that have made some strides, industrial pollution and various contaminants are still rampant and expected to remain a problem for the foreseeable future.^{96, 97} In 2017, Poland passed a new Water Act that established a new water management organization and restructured water fees.⁹⁸

Outlook

Before the pandemic, Poland was expected to experience economic and political instability as the rapid economic growth showed signs of slowing in 2019. PiS remains controversial as it continues to pursue nationalist policies that could affect its relationship with the EU; with Andrej Duda's narrow reelection in 2020, it is expected that the PiS agenda will continue uninterrupted.^{99, 100} The fallout of the COVID-19 crisis is still yet to be determined, although a spike in unemployment is expected as is a significant slowdown of economic activity. Despite the uncertainty, Poland's fiscal and monetary strength has positioned the country to be able to mitigate some of the fallout and possibly recover quickly.^{101, 102, 103}

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- 92 Santander Trade Markets, "Poland: Economic and Political Outline," July 2020, https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/poland/economic-political-outline?actualiser_id_banque=oui&id_banque=0&memoriser_choix=memoriser
- 93 Gov.uk, "Guidance: Overseas Business Risk – Poland," 27 November 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-business-risk-poland/overseas-business-risk-poland>
- 94 The Economist, "Poland," n.d., <https://country.eiu.com/poland#>
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- 96 European Environment Agency, "Poland – Industrial Pollution Profile 2019," 20 December 2019, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/industry/industrial-pollution/industrial-pollution-country-profiles-2019/poland>
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- 99 Intellinews, "Outlook 2020 Poland," 13 January 2020, <https://www.intellinews.com/outlook-2020-poland-174464/>
- 100 Mark Katkov, "Poland's Nationalist President Narrowly Wins Reelection," NPR, 13 July 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/13/890317015/polands-nationalist-president-narrowly-wins-re-election>
- 101 The World Bank, "The World Bank in Poland," 16 April 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/poland/overview>
- 102 Santander Trade Markets, "Poland: Economic and Political Outline," July 2020, https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/poland/economic-political-outline?actualiser_id_banque=oui&id_banque=0&memoriser_choix=memoriser
- 103 Focus Economics, "Poland Economic Outlook," 7 July 2020, <https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/poland>

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 5 | Security, Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|----|--|------|-------|
| 1. | The United States and Poland have virtually no diplomatic relations. | True | False |
| 2. | The Czech Republic and Poland have ties that trace back to medieval times. | True | False |
| 3. | Ukraine and Poland have strengthened their alliance due to the shared threat of Russia. | True | False |
| 4. | Poland has two major branches of law enforcement. | True | False |
| 5. | Cyberattacks are virtually nonexistent in Poland thanks to sweeping and stringent cybersecurity legislation. | True | False |

Poland in Perspective

Chapter 5 | Security, Assessment Answers

1. False:
Poland and the U.S. enjoy a strong relationship, with Poland considered a significant ally in central Europe.
2. True:
Legends describe their close relationship with stories of two brothers named Čech and Lech, who are the ancestors to the Czech and Polish people, respectively.
3. True:
Despite Ukraine's and Poland's mutual interests, improved relations have been hindered by internal strife within Ukraine and lingering wounds from World War II.
4. True:
The national police and municipal guards administer law enforcement in Poland. Municipal guards ensure the needs of the local community are met and do not have the power of arrest.
5. False:
Cyberattacks in 2019 broke new records in Poland. In response, the Polish government is ramping up its domestic, regional, and international activity in cybersecurity efforts.

Poland in Perspective

Further Readings and Resources

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Poland in Perspective

Final Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

- | | | | |
|-----|---|------|-------|
| 1. | There are five lakelands or lake districts in Poland. | True | False |
| 2. | Poland's climate experiences little fluctuation year-round. | True | False |
| 3. | The Vistula River is the largest in Poland. | True | False |
| 4. | Warsaw is divided roughly into four quadrants by the Oder River. | True | False |
| 5. | Flooding is the greatest natural threat to Poland. | True | False |
| 6. | Christianity was introduced to Poland in the 10th century. | True | False |
| 7. | The Swedish Deluge was a time of massive immigration to Poland from Sweden. | True | False |
| 8. | After its 1772 partition, Poland regained its lost territories through a series of successful military campaigns. | True | False |
| 9. | The Warsaw Uprising was a failed attempt by Polish forces to recapture Warsaw and prevent a Soviet takeover. | True | False |
| 10. | Poland was partitioned for a final time upon the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. | True | False |

11.	Imported foods have eroded the strength of the agricultural industry.	True	False
12.	Poland's energy industry is a worldwide leader in renewable energy technology.	True	False
13.	Poland is virtually devoid of natural gas deposits.	True	False
14.	The services sector is the largest contributor to Poland's GDP.	True	False
15.	Unemployment has plagued Poland since the worldwide financial crisis of 2008.	True	False
16.	Poland's Jewish population dropped from 3 million to 300,000–600,000 after the events of World War II.	True	False
17.	Poland is a largely vegetarian society, the result of a historical shortage of available livestock.	True	False
18.	The <i>sukmana</i> is a ceremonial cap worn by Poles during weddings.	True	False
19.	Literature is the most prominent art form in Poland.	True	False
20.	Soccer (football) is the most popular sport in Poland.	True	False
21.	Belarus and Poland have had a hot and cold relationship since the fall of communism in the region.	True	False
22.	Germany has agreed to pay reparations to Poland for atrocities committed in World War II.	True	False

- | | | | |
|-----|--|------|-------|
| 23. | Russia still maintains significant influence over Poland. | True | False |
| 24. | The Polish armed forces have five branches. | True | False |
| 25. | Poland's bodies of water suffer from an overall significant amount of pollution. | True | False |

Poland in Perspective

Final Assessment Answers

1. True:
The five lakelands are Great Poland, Kashubia, Masuria, Pomerania, and Suwałki. The Great Poland and Masurian lakelands are the most prominent, with thousands of lakes in additions to forests, meadows, pastures, marshes, and dunes.
2. False:
Poland experiences six distinct seasons year-round: winter, early spring, spring, summer, fall, late fall, and early winter. Each season brings distinct weather phenomena throughout the region.
3. True:
The Vistula runs 1,047 km (651 mi) and features a drainage basin of 194,000 sq km (75,100 sq mi). The river originates in the Beskid Mountains and empties into the Baltic Sea.
4. False:
The Vistula River bisects Warsaw and creates a 1,190 m (3,900 ft) boundary between the two halves of the city.
5. True:
The Vistula and Oder rivers have been historically prone to flooding during the summer and winter months. Despite infrastructure to mitigate the potential for disaster, flooding still occurs.
6. True:
Mieszko I, a Roman Catholic convert, brought the religion to the ruling dynasty during his reign. It remains the dominant religion in Poland today.
7. False:
The Swedish Deluge period was marked by skirmishes between Poland and Sweden, which were solved with a fragile truce in 1655 with the signing of the Treaty of Oliva.
8. False:
Poland experienced three partitions in total. By the end of the 18th century, Poland virtually ceased to exist for 123 years until the aftermath of World War I provided the opportunity for Poland to reunite.
9. True:
In 1944, the Polish resistance staged the uprising, an attempt to recapture the city ahead of the Soviet army. However, deliberate interference from the Soviets ultimately led to the failure of the uprising.
10. False:
The Third Polish Republic formed in the aftermath of decades of communist rule. The overwhelming victory of the anti-communist group Solidarity provided the opportunity for Poland to shift to a free-market economy.

11. True:
Because of the growth of food imports, agricultural employment dropped steadily in the 1990s.
12. False:
Poland's energy—specifically electricity—is heavily reliant upon coal. Poland is also the ninth-largest coal producer in the world.
13. False:
A study in 2015 identified 4.13 trillion cubic m (146 trillion cubic ft) of recoverable gas resources in Poland, although explorations of these reserves have not identified viable and accessible extraction points.
14. True:
The services sector—banking, communications, and retail—accounted for 57.4% of GDP in 2017. Estimates from 2015 show that 57.6% of the labor force is employed in services.
15. False:
Poland's unemployment rate has trended downward in recent years, with occasional periods of undulations.
16. True:
Jews inhabited the region starting in the 10th century and grew in prominence over the centuries. The Holocaust devastated the Jewish population in Poland; today, it is estimated that as few as 6,000 Jews currently live in Poland.
17. False:
Poland's rich culinary history features food staples such as meat, bread, and potatoes. The kielbasa sausage originated in Poland and is one of the country's more popular cuisine staples.
18. False:
A *sukmana* is a coat that was traditionally worn by impoverished people. It typically came in darker colors, was at least knee-length, and featured simple embroidery.
19. True:
Poland's literary tradition dates back to oral literature such as folk songs, legends, poetry, jokes, and riddles. Literature is highly celebrated and considered an essential element of Polish identity.
20. True:
Like much of Europe, soccer is very popular in Poland. It first emerged in 1921 and has been a mainstay in the country ever since.
21. True:
Despite their rocky diplomatic history, the two countries maintain a strong trade relationship.
22. False:
Germany rejects the idea of reparations given that Poland renounced its claims to them in 1953.

23. False:
Russia's history with Poland is marked by periods of warfare, corruption, and tragedy. In 2020, the Russian ambassador in Poland characterized their relationship as "the worst since the end of WWII."
24. True:
Poland's armed forces is composed of Polish Land Forces, Air Forces, Navy, Special Forces, and Territorial Defense Forces. As of 2019, the armed forces totaled 117,000 personnel.
25. True:
Pollution remains a significant problem in Poland's lakes, rivers, and the Baltic Sea. Despite recent efforts to reduce pollution that have made some strides, industrial pollution and various contaminants are still rampant.